Turn Left at the Big Osprey Nest

More from the Beacon Years (1988-1993)

Susan Engle Roquemore

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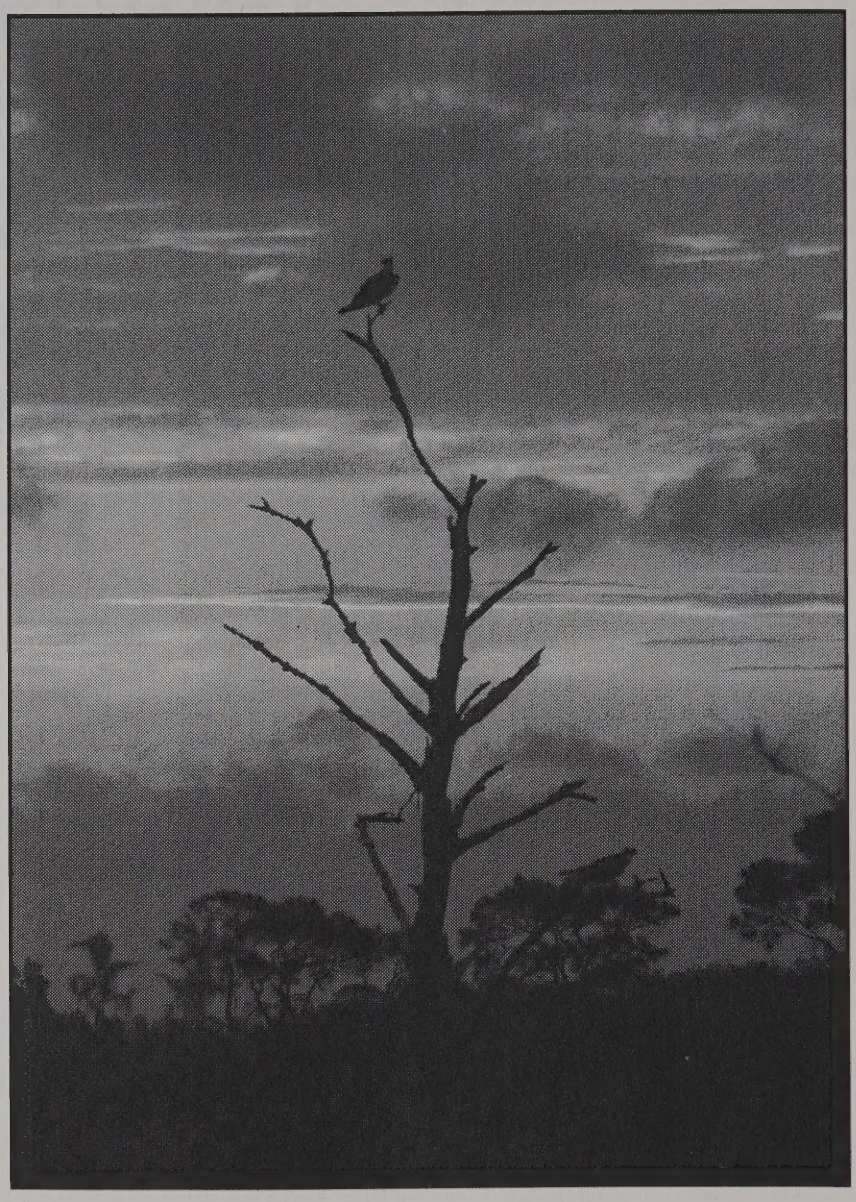


Boogie Ridge osprey at dawn

CONTENTS

Preface	1
The Story So Far	3
Memories	
The Tampa Days	5
The Very Many First Days of School	15
The Lost Arts: Readin', Ritin', 'Rithmetic	18
Caution—This May Be Too Violent for Children!	20
Treasures I Have Known and Loved—and Lost	21
I Can't Sing...I Am Catholic	24
The Day My Father Made the Whistles Blow	26
Jobs That I Have Known and Loved—I Can Think of Two (It's for You to Guess)	26
Where Is the 800 Number When You Need It	29
Jog Your Radio Days Memory	31
Nostalgia Quiz Results	33
The Orlando Days	35
Home Alone? (Don't Count on It!)	36
House Rules	41
Remember the Beatles	42
Yesterday's Yuppies	44
Maids Are Just Not Her Thing	45
Come with Me to Zee Darkroom, Dahlink!	47
Go! Go! Go Danny Go! Danny B. Goode	49
A Stitch Loose? Why Not a Couple of Whole Rows	51
The Cedar Key Days	54
That "Will-O'-The-Wisp" Memory (a Postscript)	54
Once in the Age of Innocence	56
Kids Almost—Not Quite—Civilized	58
My Life Flashes Before My Eyes	59
Spring Break May Break Me Yet	61
A Really "Moving" Experience	62
One Big Happy Family (Just Don't Walk on My Freshly Waxed Deck!)	65
A Very Special Mother's Day	67
Mama	70
A National Sport–Complaining About Our Children	71

Dear House, You Are Really Very Small, Just Big Enough for Love, That's All—You Want a What???? 72
A Mother's Day Story 74
My Mother and Her "Pot" Plants 75
Tripping with My Mom Is a "Real Trip" 79
Words 81
Bye Mama, See You Later—Save a Cloud for Us 82
The Holidays 88
Thanksgiving is Family 89
The Gift that Was 90
The Thirteen Days of Christmas 92
Ethelred the Unready 93
It's that Time of Year 94
Be It Resolved! 97
New Years Resolutions and How to Avoid Them 98
Looking Over the Shoulder at 1991 99
Critters 101
Little Cautious about Cats? No Way! But Don't Tangle With Them 103
A Curious Thing about Cats 105
Ichabod, the Hiking Cat, and Others 109
Bats in the Belfry 112
The Wolf In My Life 114
Scratch Scratch—Itch Itch: It's Summertime 118
Snake Stories 121
On the Art of Being Sick 123
Back to Nursing? "No Way, Jose!" 125
Childproof Caps and Other Absurdities of the Modern World 127
An Aside on the Tools of the Trade 129
The Plight of the Patient Patient 131
If You Think Being Sick Is Bad, Just Go to the Drug Store—You Won't Die Laughing 133
Money: The Making & Unmaking Thereof 136
Accustomed to Eating Regularly 136
Investing for "Retirement"—Susan Style 138
I Don't Do Money...and Other Things 140
Mr. David Goes on a Shopping Spree 141
Aw, C'mon Ross 142

Why I Don't Like Money 144
And, Dealing with Institutions... 146
'Tis the Season to Shop, Shop, Shop 148
I Like Yard Sales Too! 150
Trash And Treasure—a National Pastime 152
Go Take a Hike 154
Yes Virginia, There is a Florida Trail 155
More of the Real Florida 159
Don't Let Your Girls Grow Up to be Cowboys 162
A Few Little Rants & Rambles 166
Baby Goats, Children and Young'uns
What's in a Name? 166
This Business of Time Can Be Silly 167
Signs, Signs, Signs 169
Common Sense and the Census 171
Appliances 172
If You Are What You Read, Then I Am in Trouble 173
Watermelon Wine and Old Movies Make Me Cry 175
Let's Get Environmental 178
Walking on the Wildflower Side 178
Interviews Are Where You Find Them 179
Recycling 182
"That's Not the Way We Do It Back Home" 184
What Ever Happened to the Cross Florida Barge Canal? 186
The Barge Canal is History;
Now What About the Reservoir? 189
In Closing... 191

2nd Street, Cedar Key, Florida, in the 1990's

Preface

Some time ago, Robin Raftis said to me, "Why don't you do a book? I'll be your editor." Robin in fact *was* my editor in my capacity as columnist for the *Cedar Key Beacon,* the weekly newspaper for Cedar Key, an island city on the Gulf Coast of Northwest Florida.

Twenty-five years pass. Robin divorces, moves to Jacksonville, Florida. She engages herself in computer programming and in working with some high profile Florida historians such as Stetson Kennedy. Robin and I continue a long-distance friendship but collaboration on our own book never came to fruition. Robin died—far too soon.

My book for most of those years was often discussed but rarely touched. Husband Dave and I were too busy hiking trails (another story in itself), building another life in a mountain retreat, and exploring the rest of the world by air, boat, train, auto and footfall.

The book simmered on the back burners of our minds' eyes, and then David brought it to a boil at a time when we both needed to escape the reality of the moment at hand. The book as originally conceived magically became more than one book. *Water Under the Number 4 Bridge* was the first book to reach print.

As with the first book, *Turn Left at the Big Osprey Nest* reflects my years of newspaper column writing. My columns covered the waterfront (depending on the tide of my mind at the time) and wandered at times away from Cedar Key and into family stories. These books hold hands with one another. They see different things with the same eyes and the same things (sometimes) with different perspective.

Water Under the Number 4 Bridge was largely my love letter to Cedar Key. Much of *Turn Left at the Big Osprey Nest* is my homage to family memories, an autobiography in bits and pieces.

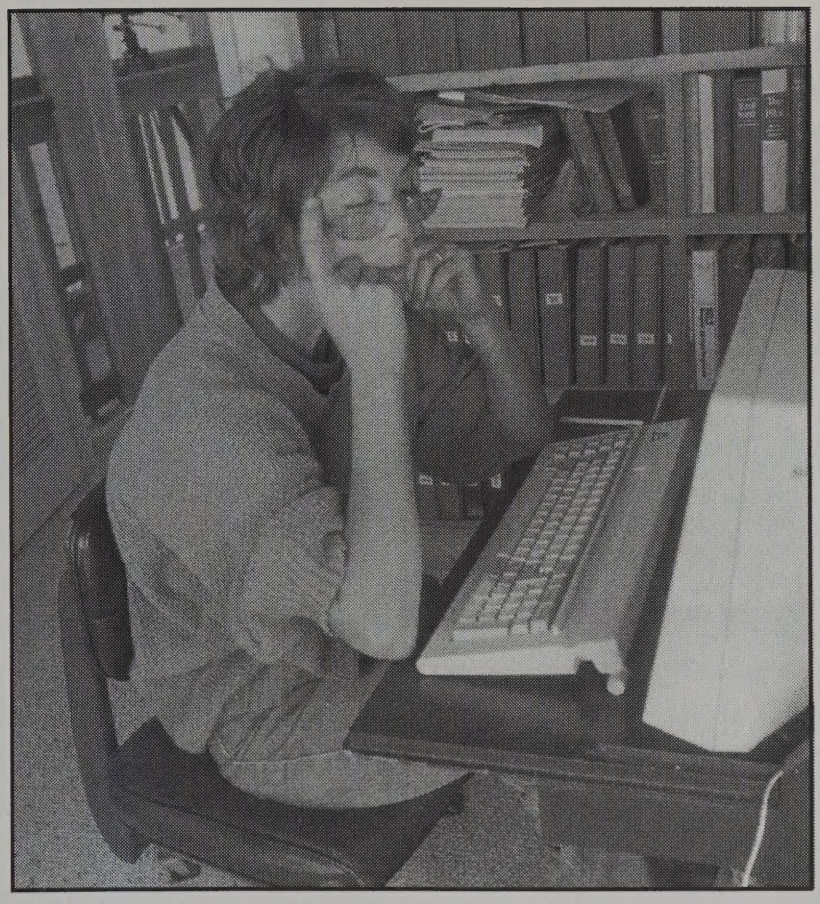
The name of this book deserves explanation (before you ask). Until the advent of the 9-1-1 emergency system, Cedar Key was not blessed (or cursed) with street names and house numbers. For a

while our home address (coined in collaboration with the local Postmaster, Joe Knight, since he needed one for his records) was 8 (our lot number) Boogie Ridge Drive, a street designation not existing on any map. We were perfectly content to use this unofficial street address for the occasional package delivery and our post office box number for everything else.

Back then, no street sign on Highway 24 pointed to something called "Boogie Ridge Drive." (Indeed, our friend Janet Betts insisted that "Boogie Ridge" as a name for our area was vulgar; the proper name was "Osprey Point" of Haven's Island.) Conveniently and properly, however, at the necessary turnoff stood a very large pine tree with a very large, very visible osprey nest. Thus our instructions to visitors looking for our home: "Once you cross the Number 4 Bridge coming into Cedar Key, turn left at the big osprey nest."

One summery day we turned "left at the big osprey nest" into our "Dead End" Boogie Ridge Drive, and found two signs welcoming us. At the corner was a sign saying "SW 153rd Court," ostensibly directing one to the new state marine research laboratory. Further in was the sign "SW 154th Avenue." This would become our official street address. It sounded like something one might use as a return address in the Bronx or Brooklyn, NY. Not sleepy little Cedar Key!

Law abiding residents that we try to be, we had the perfunctory return address labels made. I, however, could not ditch the habit of telling friends just to "turn left at the big osprey nest." This proved to be a good idea since shortly after the street naming a cousin coming to visit relied on his GPS to find SW 154th Avenue. That trusty piece of equipment instructed him to turn left prematurely, a half mile too soon, and to drive straight into Wacassassa Bay. The "osprey nest" is at least on *terra firma.*



The Thinker, Cedar Key Style

The Story So Far

Susan and her entourage—consisting of one son, one cat and one part-time husband—after many years of residence in the big (and getting bigger) city of Orlando, Florida, seek refuge and a new life in the tiny Florida Gulf Coast city of Cedar Key. The time is August 1987.

Knowing no one, mother and son and cat settle in, their first home a buggy and unappealing single-wide mobile home. The rent was cheap and it was available on a moment's notice to allow son to start his senior year of high school on time. Soon after came a cute rental house with a picket fence and propensity to flood during serious storms. To continue to provide food, beer, cat food and other necessities, husband spends four days of the week in Orlando and

the other three days "at home" in Cedar Key, suspected by some neighbors as Susan's inamorata or big city drug dealer.

Susan's beloved typewriter—IBM Selectric, one of those with changeable typeface balls—becomes her companion, creating letters to all in her address book while the stamps last.

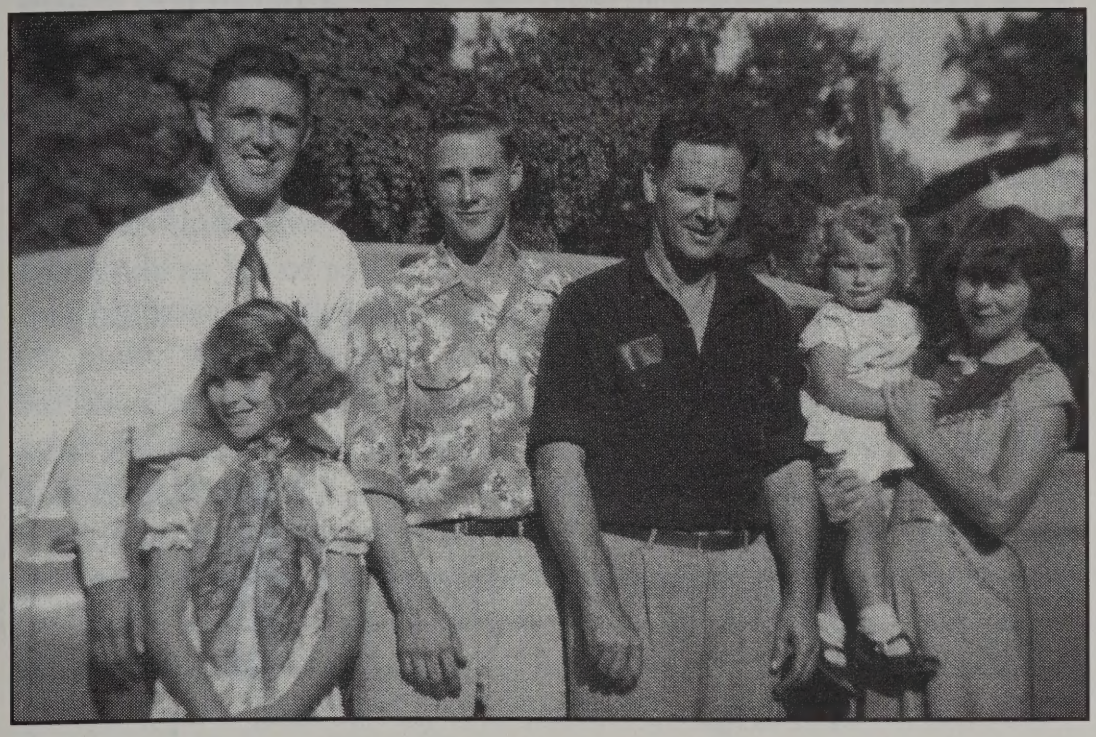
Cedar Key, although a city in name, is barely a city in population—only 700 or so full-time residents—and for years lacked a newspaper to call its own. In 1984 two daring young women filled that lack, creating the weekly newspaper *Cedar Key Beacon.*

An adventure in cooking brings together Susan and Julie Stetzel of the *Beacon.* Not one to stick with simple meat and potatoes, Susan takes on a recipe for stuffed manicotti—a comedy of mishaps she cannot resist describing on the typewritten page. This treasure of literature, after much reflection by Susan on the proper drawer, box or trash can to file the item, somehow in the early morning hours finds its way under the door of the *Beacon* and lo, Susan's newspaper career begins. The *Beacon* door continues to receive contributions of Susan articles. The *Beacon* changes ownership—Mike Raftis, otherwise known as "Salty," acquires the paper, hires Robin Heilmann as Editor, marries Robin—who finally confronts Susan of the mysterious under-the-door articles with a camera lens, thus attaching a picture to the printed word.

The printed word, in a weekly *Beacon* column called "Impressions of an Island Lifestyle," runs for five years—the friendship between Robin and Susan lasts a lifetime.

Memories

The Tampa Days



Here they are—my cast of characters BD (Before Dave)—
Brother Tommy, Brother Jack, Daddy Tom, Sister Kathy, Mama Lorraine, and upfront, Yours Truly, the Fashion Plate of 1952

I was born in Tampa, Florida on a Sunday in September 1942. My mother was born in Hamilton, Ohio in 1910, the only child in a Catholic family. She and Daddy (born in Ludlow, Kentucky in 1906 into a non-denominational clan—i.e., anything but Catholic is fine) eloped before joining the migration south to Florida in 1929.

My parents seemed to practice a form of family planning known as "spread the children out so we can afford to raise them" or "the modified seven-year plan" (a plan so specialized that not even the Pope was aware of it). In its purest form, the seven-year plan meant having a child every seven years until you decide to stop. My parents weren't purists, so the actual births weren't exactly seven years apart—but "close enough for government work." Thus, my

brother Tommy, born in January 1929, my brother Jack, born in September 1935, and my sister Kathy born in August 1950.

Tampa, a bustling seaport not squarely on the Gulf of Mexico but indented into the land on the more sheltered Tampa Bay, supported a good sized naval ship yard and a strategically located air force base during those war years. My father, a skilled and experienced machinist and inventor in his own right, worked at the Tampa Ship Yard. I am sure this facility had a proper name but we simply referred to it as "The Shipyard." Daddy continued working there until the shipyard itself was "scrapped" sometime around 1947. At this particular facility luxury ocean liners were converted to transports for military personnel. My dad used to like to tell us about the story-high paintings and the deep pile carpeting that the soldiers and sailors would be trodding on their way to Europe.

Daddy left for work about 7 AM and would leave work for home at 5:15. I knew these hours because he would faithfully telephone to see if my mother needed for him to buy anything on the way home. My mother never drove a car. It was a moot point since we only had one car anyway. Gas was rationed well after the war ended.

Daddy drove a 1936 Oldsmobile coupe with two bench seats. When I was old enough to need a seat (rather than a lap), Daddy removed the rear shelf from in front of the rear window, fitted it behind the rear seat and I had my very own "mother-in-law" seat--inside the vehicle of course! It wouldn't pass today's rigorous child safety rules. Indeed no automobile had seat belts and children did not have car seats back then.

No automobiles were built for the general public during the course of the war. The assembly lines were converted to military manufacturing. Of course, there would be need for military vehicles as well—jeeps, tanks, construction and destruction equipment. Rubber for tires was at a premium since the material came from islands threatened or already held by the enemy Japanese. A shortage of rubber would continue even after the war—a problem not just for the private automobile industry but even for my family when they later got into the model (hobby) business selling airplane and race car parts. As a child I learned a great deal about synthetic rubber and early plastics. I probably knew more about the DuPont Company before I was six than many adults do today. My brother Jack

and I tested the synthetic rubber out by chewing it. It's a wonder we didn't die a dozen bouncing deaths!

Lots of things were in short supply, including metals and aluminum. Children did their part for the war effort by peeling the "tinfoil" from chewing gum wrappers, balling it and saving it for a collection person. Whether our tiny collections were actually recycled still amuses me to wonder. Could it be that they were just giving us something to do to feel proud about?

My childhood companions were often my two older brothers, Tommy and Jack—more often Jack since he was only seven years older than me. Our adventures became the grist of several Beacon columns.

My brothers were too young for military service. Tom, the eldest child, would graduate from high school in 1946. He was in ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps). This was a high school program that taught the teens the rudiments of military service. Tommy loved it! He rose to rank of Major. I think he probably just liked bossing people around but apparently he was good enough to get the stripes and a really big impressive saber that he wore (and let me hold). The saber was as big as I was. Tommy went to college in September 1946.

Jack and Tommy shared a room in our house on Clearfield Avenue in Tampa. When I came along, there were no more bedrooms so I became a dining room fixture on a cot next to the dining table, under the window which also housed a canary cage. It never crossed my mind that this might be considered a "hardship." My clothes were kept in my brothers' walk-in closet—and I had a dresser in that room (to be more accurate, a drawer in a dresser). When Tommy went to college the sleeping arrangements didn't change but I had more closet and dresser space. The house on Clearfield was really a nice house—just small. It got curiouser after 1950 when my sister was born—she had her crib in my parents' room until we booted Jack out of his room a year or so later.

We all spent a great deal of time out of doors. The house was situated two blocks from the Hillsborough River and a very large storm drainage ditch ran as a divider between our property and our next door neighbor. My brothers would take my father's cement mixing trough (about the size of a shallow utility trailer) and after a storm, when the ditch was high and running fast, they would (bamboo) pole themselves down to the river in it. They'd never ever

let me go with them. On the other side of the house was an extra lot and my mother's humongous lily bed. That was where I learned some rudimentary but colorful language: My mother hated the big yellow grasshoppers that would on occasion decimate the lily bed.

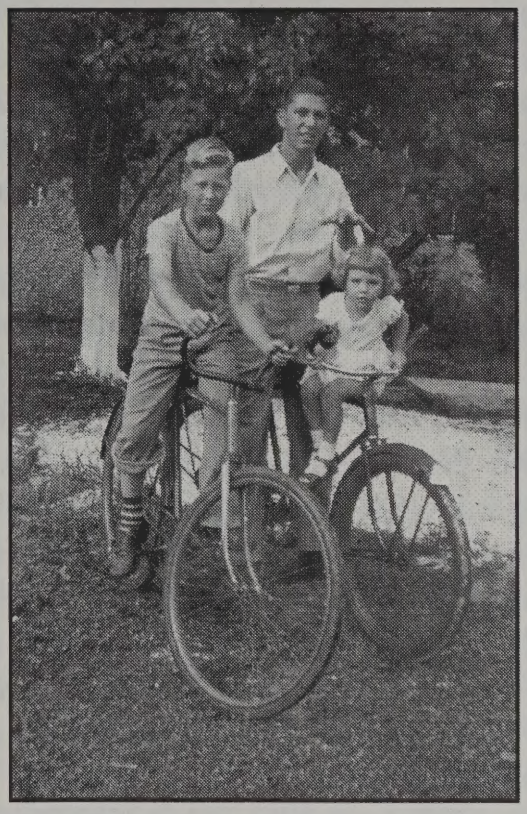
Those years when we lived on Clearfield Avenue were also years of the Dixie Hobby Shop (when "hobby shop" meant Testor's glues and raw balsa-wood model plane kits and other neat stuff waiting to be built from scratch).

My parents were determined to send Tommy to college. I am not sure how Emory University was chosen—suffice to say that I became impressed with the reality of some heavy duty expenses that came with the college experience. My parents bought a small business that my mother could manage and with luck would pay those very real expenses. Daddy was still employed by the shipyard and Mama and I would leave in the morning to bus ourselves to Sulfur Springs to the first of the hobby shops: the "Whisk." Shortly after, my parents sold the Whisk and bought another, larger and closer (walking distance) shop: the "Dixie." My mother became Miz Dixie. I learned to read from the backs of the model kit boxes and wait on customers (I could barely see over the counters). Mama let me sell things that did not cost more than one dollar. Back then there were no such things as charge cards or sales tax on merchandise costing less than one dollar.

Our clientele was mostly teenage boys—animals that I was quite at home with. Grown men were also hobbyists and we sold all manner of airplane and model racing cars. My life on weekends was in attending Tampa Miniature Race Car Club races and meets. In a lot of ways I suppose I was something like a "mascot" to the guys—always in the middle of everything. Indeed, these formative years made me a formidable first grade student.

While I was not exactly "expelled" from the public school system, my parents were strongly urged to find alternative educational facilities for me after the first grade. What I had looked forward to as "big school" had turned into daily harangues with teachers about my "need" for naps, eating onion rings as part of lunchroom fare, desk mates stealing my jewelry and my summary punishments for them, and other disruptive behavior on my part—like already knowing how to read and write and do numbers. Ergo from Grade Two forward I learned right from wrong under the no-nonsense eyes of

the nuns at Tampa's Sacred Heart Academy.



Jack, Tommy and me circa 1945—and yes, like everyone else,
I did butcher my foot in the spokes

Clearfield Avenue was my residence until 1953 when my mother's mom—Grandma Helen Friedmann—lost Grandpa Eddie and came to live with us. 1953 was a year of upheaval. Jack went to college in Atlanta. (Tommy was already in Atlanta). Powers that Be at Sacred Heart Academy determined that I should take the first half of the sixth grade and couple that with the second half of the seventh grade, thus becoming double promoted into the 8th grade. Not only had I "lost" my brothers, my mom and sister went to Ohio for a month to straighten out my grandpa's estate. My entire school world changed: I had a brand new class of strangers. I was embarking on puberty without family or friends. It remains the most miserable year of my entire life. A new residence would be fitting. I wouldn't have anyone in the new neighborhood either.

Anyone who tries to write about his/her teenage years with any degree of objectivity is destined to be sadly disappointed. It is impossible even with the hindsight of over sixty years to take the edges off the still sharp images. And edges there were and images

that still are. One must remember too that what is perceived by a teenager has nothing to do with reality. As professorial as I may try to be these days I still don't know whether to laugh or cry when I think about that particular (or is that peculiar?) era in my life. Volcanoes, hurricanes, tidal waves, cyclones, earthquakes are hiccups compared to those years: here politely called "the Frierson Years."

I was almost eleven years old when school started in the Fall of 1953. I was in the sixth grade at Sacred Heart Academy in Tampa—a happy enough kid and an excellent student (if I do say so myself). Life would quickly become complicated for this nice little pre-teen girl. Probably the first whiff of impending crises was my being placed in an "experimental" class of sixth graders and seventh graders: the idea being that some of these six graders would take both grades' work and be "double promoted" to eighth grade at the end of the term. (I could write an entire dissertation on the insanity of this plan today). In fact after a week or so I, at age eleven (by then), realized I hated that program and wanted out but it was too late. Fates had intervened: my grandfather had died in Ohio and my mother left home (taking my baby sister with her) for points north. My dad said, "Stick it out until your mother comes home." Little did he know what he had asked. November came late that year.

My brothers were both away in college; my mother and sister in Ohio; my dad at work all day; and my former classmates (including all two of my friends) were in the class below me (physically downstairs as well as a year behind now). We would (as a family) soon divorce ourselves from our old neighborhood when we bought a larger home across town on that now familiar road: Frierson Avenue.

I didn't even know I was lonesome. That's how lonesome I was. As it turned out there were only two of us "experimental" students who jumped into 8th grade the next year: the other a girl (Sharon) who had missed a full year earlier due to illness and me, myself and I. I was thrust into a coed eighth grade of thirteen-year-olds before I knew how to hook a brassiere and had even less reason for that information. Segueing into the "society" of that eighth grade class was akin to sneaking into a roomful of housecats. Eventually I heard a few friendly "meows." People thought I was "smart" but I didn't feel so smart. I made my "A's"—that was the easy part.

When we moved to Frierson Avenue I found that two of my girl classmates (Lois and Sharon) lived nearby—one whose mother picked her up from school every day after work. The three of us "hung out" after school waiting for Sharon's mom. I learned from them how to act like a teenager, what to listen to on the radio and which songs were "in" ("Hearts Made of Stone Doo Wop!"). Both of these girls took ballet lessons—something that was as interesting to me as gator wrestling. (My athletic prowess began and ended with a Tarzan swing from a bamboo tree and a back yard jump-rope.) My social circle enlarged a bit to include three Pats. The eighth grade became tolerable. I became a member of the SHAGP (girl patrol)—which meant I wore a red sash across my white uniform blouse, allowing me to be an after school crossing guard (helping the "real" patrol boys). I hadn't made it to the "inner circle" of cheerleaders but this job was way cool. Glee Club used me for volume—or so my family insisted. The older of my two brothers was employed and began buying things for me: teenage needs like portable hi-fi equipment and regular packages of the Top Ten records (45's) on the (Atlanta) charts. It didn't hurt my self esteem any to have those top tunes even before they hit it big time in Tampa. I hauled that big suitcase of a record player around with utmost pride and reveled in the envious glares and gapes. The record player would bellow everything from movie scores to Elvis to the Everly Brothers. I had no idea I was paying my dues into the sisterhood of teenager-dom. Technology would not change for several years. That record player would go to the University of Florida with me—only the records would change.

Meanwhile, back on the homefront, my grandma had moved to Tampa from Hamilton, Ohio. She now had her own little apartment in a bungalette behind our new home and was settling in. She learned the bus system and went to Mass what seemed like three or four times a week. It seemed extreme to me but it was her business. I'd probably say the same thing today. My mom had her hands full with a new (very old—1904) house and a toddler. I had for sisterly reasons upset my baby sister Kathy (almost four) with stories of ghosts in what should have been her bedroom and for my efforts got her as a "roommate." Later I would share this same room with her hamsters and guinea pigs. That big house kept getting smaller.

K4ZRM

My dad had taken refuge in the downstairs apartment of grandma's bungalette building for himself in what he called his "ham shack." Daddy was fulfilling a lifelong (since the 1920's anyway) ambition of becoming an amateur radio operator. He built magical machinery with radio tubes and plugs and gizmos of red, black and white coated copper wire. There were screens and lights and buzzers. There were scopes and keys and screens. The day came when he passed a federal licensing examination and was officially allowed to transmit messages over the air as a bona fide radio station. He was KN4TVQ. The "N" meant that he was a "novice" and was limited in scope of transmission. He would use Morse Code to communicate with other "hams" across the nation and indeed around the globe. Soon he would take another test, drop the "N", and become officially K4TVQ (colloquially King 4 Thomas Victor Queen). At that point he was allowed to use speech as well as Morse code (within the assigned amateur radio bandwidths). I was hypnotized, mesmerized, sold. "Can I do that?", I asked. Daddy handed me a big fat box of books—his radio theory course books. Within a year I was KN4ZRM and in another few months K4ZRM—a call sign as dear to me today as any trail name or degree I've ever earned. K4ZRM was the youngest female ham radio operator in Florida. That telegraph "key" opened a lot of doors.

The summer of 1956 started weirdly enough. My parents, who were not known for traveling anywhere unrelated to funerals or graduations, decided to take us (Grandma Helen, Kathy and me) on a trip to Miami. Years before, my dad had proclaimed that "I've been to Miami and there is no reason to go back." To this day I have no clue as to what prompted this gesture of family togetherness. Go we did! I remember only two whits of the entire trip: I had started that most female of courses the week before we left and I had purchased an extra duffel bag exclusively for Kotex pads ("Nice" girls didn't use tampons). I had a booklet that explained the process: the basic "whys" and "wherefores" (published by whom-else? The Kotex Company.) It never occurred to me to ask my mother (or godforbid, my grandmother or god-godforbid my doctor brother or any other human being) how much of this stuff I might need or when I'd need it again.

That summer goes down in the annals as one of discovery. The second noteworthy tidbit was that on the Tamiami Trail (US 41 through the Everglades) we stopped to pick up a turtle crossing the road. I duly named him "Tamiami" and he would be my companion and confidante for years to come. How many teenage girls do you think cuddle up to a box turtle? Old "T" was a good listener.

My brother Jack came home from college love-sick. I'd never seen him so miserable. He played with my sister and her toddler friends while he planned his part in a voyage of voyages, trek of treks, road trip of road trips with our older brother Tom who was still in Atlanta. Tommy was now earning his way in the world by being the MOC of the CDC of the USPHS. I mean, like this was a big time job that today would strike terror into any young doctor's heart. Then it was entry level (Medical Officer in Charge) position into what would become today's powerful Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta. Tommy and his dentist counterpart in the CDC planned a bare-bones trip to the American West in Tom's World War II army-issue jeep. The guys were waiting for Jack to feel better. Jack did not get to feeling better: he was diagnosed not so much with "love" but with mumps! My mother hustled him into the master bed with hot water bottles, ice packs, ice cream… Jack really was miserable by now. The dentist-friend ran out of vacation time. Jack's jaw and neck still looked like he had gone several rounds with Joe Louis. (We hadn't heard of Cassius Clay/Muhammed Ali yet.)

The summer days rolled on.

I said "Jacky? Can I go with you and Tommy?" Jack's blue eyes went green then took on a mischievous turquoise: "Ask Daddy." The chance of my father letting his "little Susie" go off with her Twenty-Something-Year-Old Brothers in a jeep to god-knows-where and sleep on the ground for the better part of the summer was beyond the pale. I asked him, "Daddy, can I go?" The rest of the summer ranks right up there with ham radio tickets and Appalachian Trail completions. It was in many ways one of my "rites of passage." It was a month or so of joy condensed from sweat and tears and fears. Hugs and shrugs. Yakking and smacking. We met no bears nor dragons on the way—but we learned to love each other and live with each other. Sisters and brothers should do that at some point in their lives.

My teenage years puttered along nicely after that summer. I might actually survive and go on to great things.

Being precocious with no intention of being a nun or the first female priest, I escaped Tampa and my Catholic girl's school at the wise old age of sixteen to enter the real world—the pagan, evil, romantic, exciting University of Florida. (When asked by my dad where I wanted to attend college, I replied, "The biggest place you can afford," with the veiled threat that otherwise I'd stay home and become a telephone operator.)

My adventures at university would fill a shelf of books, many of which would reside in plain brown wrappers. Some of the tales reached my *Beacon* readers.

The University of Florida brought me a degree from the College of Nursing and a post-grad degree from the College of Education, a lifetime partner in David, a school year in Greenwich Village of hippy fame while husband pursued (successfully) a graduate law degree at New York University, and over twenty years watching the City of Orlando change from my wonderful home on Little Lake Conway to a place where one had to lock doors—and look over shoulders. The time had come to re-think our lives. Just maybe it was time to move on down the road. The mid-80's did not come with an instruction book. We wrote the rules as we went along. We found ourselves crossing bridges we didn't know existed. And, here we are—the south side of the Number 4 Bridge.

First Day, 1st Grade, Broward Elementary School, Tampa, Florida

The Very Many First Days of School

August 1991

One very fine day in September 1948, I started "big school." I wasn't yet six years old and probably today would have had to go to some sort of kindergarten or "civilization camp" before I would be allowed to enter the hallowed halls of Broward Elementary. This school was named for Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, onetime governor of the State of Florida who helped drain the Everglades. I was told by my brother Tom that I wouldn't be allowed in school without telling my teacher that. Back then my birthday was close enough to satisfy every one except the school principal, who already knew my two brothers. She probably opted for early retirement when she heard that yet another Engle would be in her school. She thought she'd seen the last of us for awhile since Jack had just been promoted to junior high and Tommy was well away at college.

I was really looking forward to school. I was especially looking

forward to having a real loose-leaf notebook that I could write all over (like Jack did) and be able to do my own booklets on the Punic Wars and fun stuff like that. School was going to be such great fun. The first day was okay, but after that, on a scale of 1-10, it was a Richter Scale 11—plus after-shocks.

In the first place, about a week before school was to start, I'd caught my foot in the spokes of Jack's bike. (Didn't everyone do that at least once?) In the days before sneakers, I couldn't have even worn a sneaker, and flip-flops hadn't been invented yet. Mama searched everywhere for a pair of sandals that didn't have a strap where I had a slashed foot. She settled on some green canvas things that had to have been designed by someone who hated six-year-old girls. She made it up to me by making me a dress of green-and-white crinkle crepe with cherry-red buttons and a peter-pan collar. I had to have the Toni home permanent which didn't turn out as bad as usual and predated the Afro rage by about twenty years. I'd lost a front tooth (naturally and without help of either brother). In all, I guess I looked enough like a first grader.

Jack took me to school on his bike. (I hadn't learned my lesson!) There was no need for Mama to go to school with me—yet! We convened in the auditorium (schools all had auditoriums like Cedar Key School still has) and somehow I arrived at a teacher who had no choice in the matter. Pulling on those memories (that I've spent forty years trying to forget) is like trying to re-insert that front tooth into its socket. Half the class was wailing (with mothers running in and out) and the other half was in the office getting dry underwear. Where were my big books and why did I have to put my head down and rest just when things started to get interesting? Now, I know that the teacher wouldn't have made it to lunch if she hadn't insisted that we take a nap.

We called the cafeteria "lunchroom" and the bathroom "the basement" for whatever reason, since it was like no basement I'd ever seen. Both smelled equally vile and I'm not sure that the basement with its pine odor wasn't preferable to that of steamed spinach in the lunchroom. I will never understand the people who make up kid's lunchroom menus and to be kind about it, perhaps they have changed. That first day's menu (my mother believed in "the plate lunch") was soggy spinach (no flavoring), cornbread that could have been left over from the siege of Vicksburg, and some type of hot

dog. (*I almost said "dog food!)* Some woman in a white apron passed out sliced onions and insisted that each of us take a slab. I'd lived five years and eleven months without eating raw onions and wasn't going to take a chance of not reaching age six. I was taught to be polite (and knew when I was outnumbered) and dutifully took the onion (and put it down my dress front.) After lunch, we had recess. Girls went to the trees to weave pine needles and the boys played ball or Red Rover or Red Light-Green Light or something like that. Some of the girls took ballet lessons and wowed us klutzes with their plies. Since my foot hurt, I was exempt from all of the frou-frous, even if I had known how to do them.

Back in the classroom, it was "heads down" time again. I was thinking that I'd had my head on that desk more than I had paper on it. Miss Hood was obviously trying to call her mother or somebody to figure out what to do with us next. Mama made her appearance at school on my behalf a short few days later: "Your daughter is not adjusting to school," Miss Hood said. "She won't go to sleep and she put an onion down her dress front. She won't join my Sunday school class and already knows how to count. She insisted on calling the basement the 'bathroom' and you must know how embarrassing that can be for the other children. I don't think she likes me." (*She got that right!*)

My mom asked some questions: "Why does Susie have to go to sleep three times during the day? She hasn't taken a nap at home since she was two years old? She doesn't eat raw onions." Mama stuck up for me those first few days of school and for the next ten years at least.

The next First Day of School was at Sacred Heart Academy. We were given real books by the teachers. There was a modicum of respect for the teacher. The "basement" was now called a "lavatory." The lunchroom was a "cafeteria" but in place of the soggy spinach and raw onion we got weenies and yellow rice three days a week. The menu didn't vary until we reached high school and insisted on having pizza.

The only other memorable First Day of School was at the University of Florida. My father took one look around at the Jesus-besandaled men on campus (predating the long hair and beards) and said a not-so-silent non-sectarian prayer. "Lord, deliver me from any of these for a son-in-law." Daddy lost out on that prayer, but it was

the best first day of school I'd ever had. Besides that, the food was good.

The Lost Arts: Readin', Ritin', 'Rithmetic

January 1992

I can't say that I ever lost the 'rithmetic, because I never had it to begin with. What I have of the other two "R's" was largely self-taught and nursed along by a severe case of curiosity. I do not remember when I didn't know how to read or wasn't having something read to me.

My brothers and I fought over the evening newspaper as it was being tossed into the bushes and then we would lay sprawled out on the living room floor poring over the comic strips—we called them the "funnies." I do remember them reading them to me, but as soon as I started correcting them and telling one or the other that he missed a word, I was on my own.

I remember one particular headline about the Communists and the 38th Parallel that I didn't understand. No one else did either, but I expected a succinct answer to "What is a Communist?" My effete college-student brother told me the story of the man with two cows, etc. It didn't really help and I figured I'd have to tackle this reading thing by myself (still don't know exactly what a Communist is and couldn't find the 38th Parallel on a map if I tried).

The way I did this, before I knew about libraries, was to read everything in the house. We had a book called "Blitzkrieg Deutch" (literally "War German"). This was a book issued to all ROTC students in case of German attack during World War II. I'd run around the house shouting: "Alten!" There was also a steady flow of "funny-books" into the house with each Saturday's allowance. My vocabulary increased: "Zam, Pow, Biff, Sock, Whammo!"

I have no idea what they put in comic books today, but in the 1940's there were lots of Tommy guns and heists, guys with square jaws and yellow overcoats. Comic books were ten cents. My allowance was twenty-five cents, my brother Jack bought most of the books. (He got fifty cents.) This left us with the price of a movie

(fourteen cents) and we were broke again until the next Saturday unless we found and cashed in deposit bottles (two cents each). *(We recycled back then.)*

The branch library was about five miles from our house and in the days before I had "wheels" (at age five), my brother would put me in the bike basket or side saddle cross the bar and off we would go.

I don't remember much about those early library days: we lived too far to engage in the summer programs, if indeed there were any. I do remember being told by my brother—not the librarian—to be quiet or more reasonably, "Shut up." The library, like a church, was something of a holy building. It even smelled holy. Or was that musty? I preferred doing my reading at home with the materials at hand: cereal boxes, pillow tags, and Colliers.

About age thirteen we had moved to a place quite near the library. Like today's supermarket, the library was the place to be seen. Not having anything except the cute guy in the next stack on my mind, I determined to pick out the thickest book I could find to impress him with my (ahem) intelligence. (I've found out since that fourteen-year-old males are not looking at intelligence.)

I'd selected *For Whom The Bell Tolls.* The librarian looked at me a little strangely. I told her it was for a book report. She knew that I went to "that Catholic School" and figured that nuns were up to no good anyway so why not let me have a go at Ernest Hemingway. This was the summer that changed my mind about libraries. By fall, I'd gone through *A Farewell To Arms* and *The Sun Also Rises.*

To be honest, I did not know what those four-letter words meant and no one would tell me. (And I couldn't find them in Funk and Wagnalls, either.) I asked my dad what was the difference between "F–ting" and "F–king." He never did tell me.

I also read *Gone With The Wind* that summer. My book report and impression of Scarlet O'Hara was a hit with the class but Sister Elizabeth Cecelia called my mother. Mama suggested that I go back to reading cereal boxes. I've been fascinated with libraries ever since.

The library, as we know it here, is a unique American experience. Our public libraries are free. While books escalate in price at the stores (or garage sales), libraries are open and offer every subject matter for the borrowing. It was then with a sense of shock that I

overheard a conversation between a middle-aged black lady and an older white gentleman a week or so ago in Sopchoppy, Florida. He was explaining that he could write his name now in block letters and was trying to learn to read headlines of the newspaper. How could he have lived seventy years not being able to read? (or sign his name?)

She was urging him to go to a class but he was resisting. I wanted to (but didn't) run up to him and hug him and plead with him not to waste another moment. Maybe I should have done just that impulsive thing.

If a person can read, he/she can do anything. Folks, it doesn't matter much what your children read as long as they read.

Eventually, I stopped reading comic books. Eventually I read the Bible and Shakespeare. Eventually I read the package instructions on a new appliance.

Reading opens the doors of the world.

Visit your library: it isn't musty today and no one will tell you to "Be Quiet" unless you bring in your sled dogs.

If you are a reader, thank your Lord. If you aren't, this may be our Christmas present to you.

Caution—This May Be Too Violent for Children!

July 1989

My brother Tom raised chickens. Every so often Mama would go to the feed store and pick him up another batch of "biddies." Tommy carefully nursed these baby chicks and brought them into the house when the weather was cold.

Every once in awhile one would get sore feet and he would paint the feet with some mystic purple stuff (gentian violet). He would check their eyes and Vaseline them. Eventually, they made their way to the yard where they scratched around with the other older biddies and the rooster. Once in awhile a chick became a favorite: "Henny Penny" was one such. She was a Rhode Island Red distinguishable from the others only in that she came when called by name. She was hand-fed and close to being litter-box trained. She laid eggs on command and was a very proud chicken.

We had in the back yard a long four- or five-stranded wire clothesline, a large flat tree stump and a big kettle. Once a week, usually on Saturday, Mama would go out and select a chicken, Keystone Cops style (amid such squawking and protest from the rest of the coop), put that chicken's head between the wires of the clothesline and wring its neck. My dad would then put the chicken on the stump and lop its head off.

The chicken, not realizing that it was dead, would hop off the stump and run around the yard until its nervous system caught up. That's where we get the old saying "running around like a chicken with its head cut off." As I remember it, they then plunged the chicken into this big kettle of boiling water and somehow that loosened the feathers. Jack's and my job was to spend the rest of the afternoon plucking chicken feathers. Sunday for dinner, we had fried chicken, roast chicken or stewed chicken, depending on the age of the bird finally caught on Saturday.

One such Sunday dinner, in a brotherly effort to torment Tommy, Jack commented that "Henny Penny didn't taste too bad after all." The scene at that table was not pretty. Mama swore that she would never cook Henny Penny. Daddy tried to re-establish order. Grandpa Engle didn't really care; he thought the chicken was too good. I thought the whole thing was hysterically funny.

We found Tommy in the coop talking to Henny Penny who was dutifully sitting on her eggs like a good mother.

It wasn't long after that that the chickens went. All except Henny Penny who continued to provide us with eggs for breakfast but no Sunday dinners.

Treasures I Have Known and Loved—and Lost

February 1990

There is a great deal of hoopla going on around and about Fowlers Bluff these days. Heavy equipment behind the store promises that the pirate treasure will finally be taken from the Suwannee River. This isn't just a "hype." There is supposed to be real stuff down there and in recent days there is the technology to retrieve it. Several tries have been made in the past, and one, close to

successful, had it within grasp—only to have it crash through the limestone shelf of the river floor to whom knows where (presumably to the aquifer that flows to the Gulf of Mexico). The stories vary as to the successful finds a century ago and the beneficiaries are notably silent as to what was found. These stories made me think about my own little treasures and treasure hunts—not at all as dramatic as the Fowlers Bluff scenario, but every bit as unique.

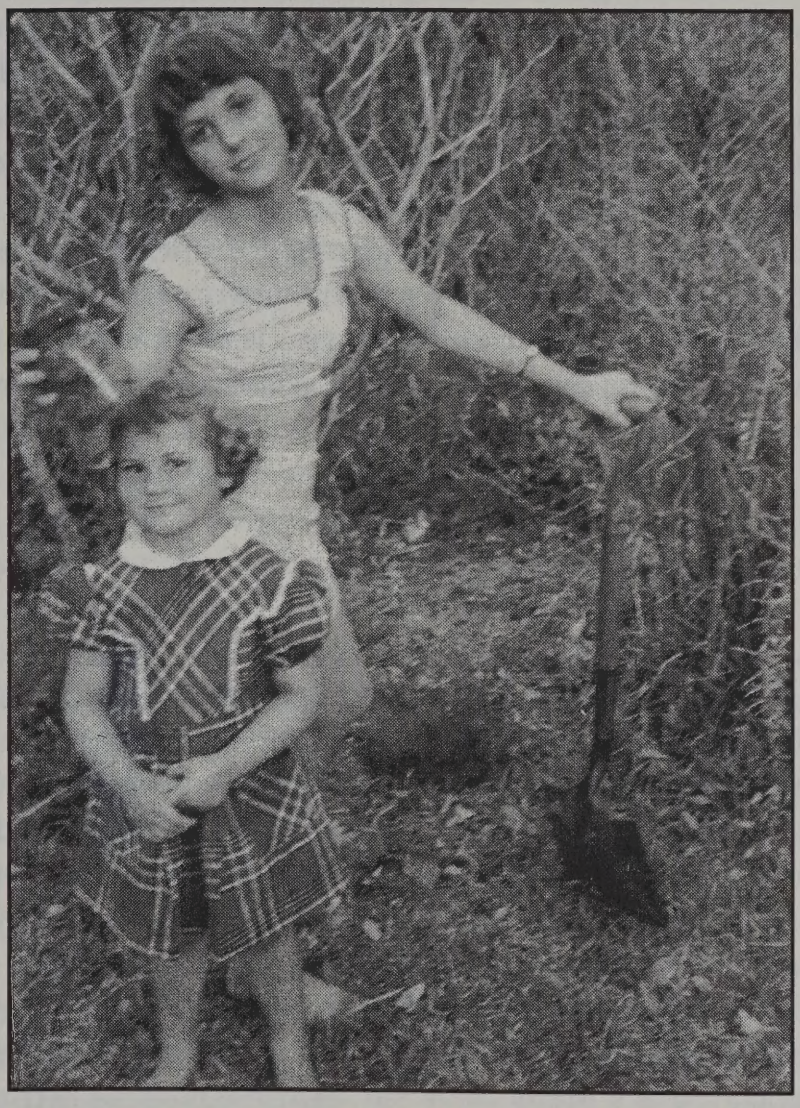
Tampa has pirate lore and I am a native Tampan. Jose Gaspar sat on my riverbank and once a year "invaded" my town. Pirates, regardless of what it says in *The Phantom* comic strips, were romantic characters in my world. My father refused to let me become a pirate as I wanted (he later refused to let me become a riverboat gambler) but he did allow my brothers and me to bury "treasure" too.

At the time of the first treasure burial I was too young to participate. My brothers sunk a hole to water level (which was about three feet down in our yard, two blocks from the Hillsborough River) and put in it the first "Engle Treasure Chest." This was circa 1944. I will explain later how I know what was in it. Individually, each item was wrapped in waxed paper and sealed with candle wax. They put the treasure in a mayonnaise jar and waxed the lid as well. It was buried exactly twelve inches from the stoop of the wash house. I know this is true because one day my second brother and I could stand it no longer—we dug it up. We vowed we'd never tell Tommy that we did so and re-planted it after duly examining it.

The day came when my parents planned to move us all to a larger house. I wrote my brothers, "What about the treasure?" Only a twelve-year-old girl could be so obsessed! I got their permission to dig up the treasure. I received strict instructions on how to re-bury it on the new property. Of course I looked again: a 1943 penny (lead), a model car, an authentic statement as to who was burying what, and some other junk important at the time. I took great pains to find a landmark that was inviolate: a cemented fish pond, with waterfall. No one would ever remove that! My brothers were away at college and my sister too young to care. I replanted that treasure exactly eighteen inches square from the curve of the northwest corner of the fish pond rim. Jack and Tommy were pleased.

Thirty some years later my parents planned another move. Only I thought of the treasure. Eighteen inches out from the northwest corner of the fishpond stood a thirty-five-foot palm tree! It

was a pretty tree and only two of us now know where its roots lay.



Kathy and I dig up the buried treasure—1952

I asked Daddy if he would cut down the palm tree. I explained to him about the treasure. He smelled my breath. That treasure lays to this day every bit as buried as the one in the Suwannee River.

There is something magical about treasure hunting. It reaches out and grabs the imagination, conjures up images of the people who hid the caches—wide eyed youngsters or jaded gangster-pirates.

This treasure burying comes naturally to me. My grandpa Eddie Friedmann buried all loose change (which in those days was sometimes gold) and paper money as well. When he died my mom and

grandmother spent several weeks digging up fence posts and the cellar floor searching for Grandpa's treasures. Someplace in Ohio someone may plow a field someday and exclaim: "Lookee what I found!" It will be a tobacco tin ("Half & Half") filled with rotted green paper and jingling with gold pieces.

For myself, I've given up burying treasure. I'm too busy spending it, enjoying it. My cats have no intention of getting buried just yet. I'll have to live on other people's dreams of unearthing that which was lost so long ago. I hope those folks down at Fowlers Bluff find a diamond or two and chuck one my way. If they decide to move on to Tampa, I know where they can find a 1943 lead penny and a little car—under a palm tree!

I Can't Sing...I Am Catholic

When I was about eleven years old, I determined to be a nun. I'd mastered the square little notes of Gregorian chant and had no prospects of finding a boyfriend or a bosom. This career choice lasted about six months when there came prospects of both on the horizon: two on my chest and the other in the grocery store. My "vocation" ceased to exist since it was not real but a fancy of pre-pubescent screeching.

In those days, before Vatican II and Pope John the Twenty-Third, Catholics were bound not to attend other church services. My mother always thought this a pretty *outrre* rule and of course we went to weddings and funerals of our friends of whatever persuasion. We went to baccalaureates and listened to Baptist preachers. Since my dad was an avowed non-sectarian, we were always forgiven or ignored or both by whichever church chose to tell us we shouldn't be doing what we were doing. (My mother could always out-talk a bishop or anybody else for that matter.)

During these rites I found out that Protestants know how to sing. It was fascinating watching the men bellow forth. The sopranos hit high notes without tears or squeaks. Now, I say to myself, how do they do that? They put their choir facing the congregation—that helps. They sing in English—that helps a lot. But the *Songs*! The *Hymns*! The majesty of the words! Lilt and lyric seemed to fit the mood. I'll never

know how much faith was spread or how much religion was going 'round, but these people enjoyed singing.

My glee club teacher put me into the second-soprano (mezzo) group when I probably should have been an alto. We studied composition and placement and grace notes. Oh, how I tried to hit some of those notes and oh, how I tried to come in on time, but our choir—how can I say it?—was dainty. There was no *gusto*! I knew every verse of the "Ave Verum" and the "Regina Coeli" (and, believe it or not, could have translated both then). It wasn't a matter of faith, but a matter of spirit. No one fills up their lungs to belt out "Cor Jesu Flagrans." Catholics, not catholic, were insular. We tended to do our "Dies Irae" and "Stabat Maters" with quiet voice. Gregorian chant, *a capella*, was popular. (The organ wasn't working, probably.)

My dad would come to church on special occasions—like when I was doing something special. Otherwise, he would sit in the car and babysit and read the Sunday paper. After one such special occasion, he asked, "Why don't you sing anything anybody can recognize?" It was Christmas Eve Midnight Mass and we had gone through versions of "Silent Night," "Jubilate Deo" and "Oh, Little Town Of Bethlehem," and a dozen other familiar religious carols. It had been a magic eve for me. I'd finally hit all the notes I was supposed to reach but Daddy asked the question: "Why don't Catholics sing?"

We lived near a Lutheran Church that had a carillon on Sunday morning. I woke to "He Walks With Me and He Talks with Me" and "Bringing in the Sheaves." (I was convinced until adulthood that this was "Bringing in the Sheep.")

There is nothing in my religion that says Catholics cannot sing as well as Protestants. Though my vocal cords aren't all that great, I'm sure we have some among us who can lustily give forth with a note or two. Why is it that the children of Methodists and Baptists sing and Catholics do not?

Protestant hymns have become my favorites. I like my Latin verse and the quality of the air, but who sings Latin these days?

David and I go to church together on occasion. The first thing he picks up is the hymnal. He sings. Loudly. It reaches the heavens. I am still looking for a musical notation to tell me how to do it when the "Amen" is rendered. I'll never reach that note in "Oh, Holy Night" but I like to recognize it. So did my dad.

The Day My Father Made the Whistles Blow

August 1993

We have studio portraits circa 1900 of weddings, funerals and christenings, First Communions and friendship photos. I see handsome young men in graduation gowns, beautiful brides and playful toddlers. I've read letters from healthy young men that died in wars that had no names—the wars or the pictures of the young men! I've cataloged Christmas cards, Easter Cards, Mother's Day cards. I know my mother's address book better than I do my own. I've read clippings from newspapers that are so poignant that I cry out loud. There's a picture of me sewing a gown for an Opera Gala in 1972. (I did things like that way back when.) I read letters from grandchildren before they learned small case printing and had never heard of Palmer Penmanship.

You have to be particularly careful when you are going through your parent's memorabilia not to miss the really important things: I found the love letters, but you will not hear about those. Dated December 15, 1944, was this notation in the margin of the yellowed newspaper page: "Tom Testing Whistles." In 1944 Daddy had three children and wasn't drafted and was working at Tampa's Navy shipyard. Part of his job was testing equipment. He was a wizard machinist and self taught. A note from the *Tampa Morning Tribune:* "Shrieking sirens...blaring whistles...6:45 this morning...brought rumors that VE Day was at hand... the shipyard [Daddy] continued to blow those whistles until about 7:30 AM." Daddy took Tampa by surprise. Little did he know that he'd be working for that reporting body, the *Tampa Tribune*, in a few years. Daddy might have been the very first "whistle-blower."

Jobs That I Have Known and Loved—I Can Think of Two (It's for You to Guess)

May 1991

Without meaning any offense to my current employers, why is it that the only jobs I have really liked pay only in warm

smiles? I tried paying a maid this way once and she ran my panty hose down the garbage disposal to show her displeasure. The fact of the matter is that pay is in inverse proportion to job satisfaction.

I remember my first real paying job: I was fifteen years old and the only reason my dad let me take it was that my best friend begged and pleaded on my behalf and she was a year older and would "look after me." ("Girls do not *work* for money in our family" was my father's dictum.) But I won and took the job.

I can't remember exactly what it was I did but it was frightfully boring. I was filing some sort of papers for Ryder Truck lines and dodging playful hands of salesmen for approximately two weeks when friend Patty Jackson and I quit and went to work for her father. The work was still boring but at least he didn't chase us around the office with a leer on his face.

I saw another face of Tampa's Ybor City. Part of our job was to secure Mr. Jackson's lunch. We'd go in the back door of this old fashioned bar (Daddy would have had kittens if he knew this—it looked like the Longbranch Saloon) when it opened at 11 AM and get monster Cuban sandwiches—with bread still hot from their bakery. The place smelled of last night's beer and smoke—such a wonderful ambiance. It was dark and the chairs were neatly piled four-square on the tables. It had a big mahogany carved counter with a room's length mirror behind it lined with every type of glass and bottle imaginable in every color imaginable. It was so very still and quiet. Mixed with the smells of stale liquor were that of Old English furniture polish and floor cleaner. The proprietor was big—I mean fat big—and had a white apron tied around his middle. He'd let us get our orange juice or cokes from an open cooler while he fixed the sandwiches.

That was the summer I learned to type on an Underwood #5 similar to the Underwood displayed at the *Beacon* office on 2nd Street here in Cedar Key. (No, folks, they really don't use it to put out the *Beacon.* Sometimes we wonder though, don't we?) These two jobs paid *very well.* Fifty cents an hour. I bought two Elvis Presley albums and a transistor radio with my earnings that summer—putting the radio on lay-away.

Four years and a college degree later I got a job at a hospital—the pay just about covered the cost of gasoline for the car, my car payment and my uniform shoes. This job was an exception to the rule—the pay was lousy and I hated the work as well.

Coming from a very progressive university teaching hospital to this Crimean War tent philosophy was like trying to re-popularize the girdle. I went back to school. It didn't pay anything at all and I loved it. The more in debt I got, the more fun I had. Graduate school requires a lot of writing—if I couldn't make the patients well, at least I sure could write about them!

My next full time job was Marriage and Motherhood. I can't say it doesn't pay well. Dave insists that this long term investment is usury and that he would have been better off financially by renting me instead of making payments. My theory is once again disproven—this is a job that pays well, has lots of fringe benefits, travel expenses, and perks like you wouldn't believe! Besides that, it is fun most of the time and not like work at all.

For several years I worked as a personnel consultant. Heavenly days—for a telephone junkie this was paradise found. For someone who considers herself mother to the world, the satisfaction of telling people how to find a job was immense. By the time I found out that I was really good at it and could make some big bucks selling, the masochistic urge to be a nurse again struck. Fortunately, this madness never lasts too long. Combine a teacher and nurse by education (and a writer by choice) with a wide streak of salesman, and you've got some sort of freak-show specimen.

There hasn't been a job invented yet to put all of these things together except Motherhood. If you don't believe me, try selling a son on bean soup or teaching a lefty to tie his shoes. Try explaining the difference between venereal disease and jock itch at 2 AM. Try comforting a jilted teenager. Know what it is like to answer the door and find a policeman there inquiring about the whereabouts of... Treasure the letters that start out:

"Dear Mom, do you remember all the food you left in the freezer when you went out of town? It isn't there anymore. The freezer blew up but the house is okay except for the water."

"Dear Mom, The cat ran away. We think he is probably run over. Dad went to Peru. P. S. The cat came back but Dad didn't. Your loving son..."

It's the best job I have ever found. Happy Mother's Day!

September 1956—Jack & Tommy & the Jeep that tried to take us on an adventure into the West. The outfit I am wearing is called a "Vesuvius Suit," the fad of 1956, in turquoise and black corduroy.

Where Is the 800 Number When You Need It

February 1990

Did you ever miss someone so much that it actually hurt? I mean physically hurt! Like a sore thumb hurt! Like a gut wrenching cramp! When you want so bad to pick up a telephone and say hello for no good reason? That you-know-they-are-gone-forever type hurt? I'm assured that this is quite normal, even though I do not always put my self in the "normal" category.

My parents more or less "planned" the family with each of us children seven years apart. How they managed this under the auspices of Pope Pius XII, I will never fathom, but that's what happened. Thus it occurred that my sister was born three months after my brother graduated from college. I was stuck in the middle some-

place: the fair-haired first daughter and brat. A girl without big brothers misses a lot. I had it all, in spades! They tortured me, taught me, teased me. I learned to kick the shins and stomp on the toes. I was an immediate "protectorate" and the neighborhood knew not to mess with me or else I'd call out "the big guns"—my brothers!

I'd wander through their forts and wantonly destroy their redans. They'd pummel me with soggy sand and threaten me with bamboo shoots under the finger nails (that was popular in the forties). Those brothers—my brothers—were two of a kind. They were *mine*!

Everybody eventually grows up and goes separate ways. My brother Tom died a few years ago. Jack lives in Utah. We see each other at weddings and wakes. (*No more. We lost Jack in 1994.*)

When Tommy died, Jack and I played a marathon game of Trivial Pursuit while my parents grieved. I beat him soundly each game and true to form, Jack threw the board on the floor and trounced it. We knew Tommy was watching (and laughing). My father never understood our screaming relationship. He always thought we were mad at each other (sometimes we were). It didn't interfere with our love.

Before he died, Tommy knew that we were moving to Cedar Key. He was a country doctor in a big city. He would have been at home here. The summer before he died I helped out in his office for a few weeks. I'd do the initial examination and give him my findings for him to diagnose. This was my feeble effort to keep him off his feet as much as possible. Oh, how we argued! He'd tell me, "Go and wash a bedpan or something!" I correctly spotted several allergic reactions to medications and humble pie was served all around. His patients brought him homemade soup and casseroles since they noticed his weight loss. They loved Doctor Tom too.

Tommy would have been sixty-one years old this month. I wanted to tell him about all the things that are going on in Cedar Key. I wanted to tell him some secrets that burst from my breast. I wanted to hear him tell me how stupid I am or to "shut up and wash a bedpan!"

This then is what makes us human beings: feeling. We shouldn't be ashamed to feel or cry or make mistakes. This week I admit to mourning two great men in my life: my dad and a brother. Oh how

I wish there was a toll-free number!

Jog Your Radio Days Memory; Take the Nostalgia Quiz!

Cedar Key Beacon

The magic that is childhood lives on in our mind's eye. The colors, the smells, the touches can be retrieved by a casual remark or tune.

This happened to me at the gas station the other day when Richard Zeigler said, "Twang your magic twanger, Froggie." Someone else might have slapped his face, but I knew exactly what he meant.

I flipped the latch to my gas cap. "You know Froggie the Gremlin?" he quizzed.

"Sure. But do you know the name of the show, the sponsor, the day and the time slot in which it aired?" I was smug!

While the car was filling with gasoline he asked me what the "Shadow" knew!

Any child of the forties could have told him: "What evil lurks in the hearts of men." (Most teenage girls are in on this one as well.)

"What was Buster Brown's dog's name?"

"Where did they live?" he shot at me Quiz Kids style.

"I'm Buster Brown, I live in a shoe. Here's my dog Tige, he lives there too!" In chorus we gave the same emphasis to each word.

Richard had the last word: He caught me on "Who is Everywhere?"

"Chicken-Man."

Frankly, I think he made it up or it is a figment of an Indiana childhood. Has anyone else ever heard of "Chicken-Man?" (I don't mean Colonel Sanders!)

Oh, I could have nailed him with important people: Who did a song where Chewing Gum is stuck to the rail, Cabbage is leading by a head...Grandma's Girdle in the stretch and here comes *Beetlebomb*!

As a child, in pre-TV days, there was a radio in every room of our house. (One Christmas, unbeknownst to the others, everyone gave each other a radio. Those things happen in the best of

families.) Our family retired about nine o'clock...listening to the creaky door of *Inner Sanctum* more than once, and *Gangbusters* regularly. (We always knew who the bad guys were.) Once, my parents woke to shouting and shooting. My dad told my mother, "Go back to sleep it's *The Sheriff*." The next day they found a blackjack in front of the house. Realism? You bet!

Television disappointed some of us. We had imagined a different Matt Dillon and Joe Friday. We knew just what the Green Hornet's car looked like and to hear that *buzzz-whirrr* left us excited. We didn't need to see the villains spattered on the wall to know that the bad guy "got his."

There was a move afoot even in those days to take the "violence" off the air. When quizzed by my first grade teacher about favorite radio shows there was no doubt in my mind: *Sam Spade*. My mother went to the school office one more time. Sometimes I think my mother spent more time at school than my first grade teacher.

The teacher didn't like my reading material either. My brothers and I had six feet of comic books that we read and re-read and even translated to our own radio show—broadcast to the neighborhood. While I had my share of "Little Lulus" (my nickname at the time), I tended to prefer *Mr. District Attorney*. (Another disappointment on TV.)

One of the all-time radio greats was *The FBI in Peace and War*. (Can you imagine the ratings that would get today?) Everyone was sought for "unlawful flight to avoid prosecution." I asked my teacher what that meant. It was obvious that she couldn't figure out why I would want to know. My brother told me it meant: "Taking it on the lam, sister." I could understand *that*!

Everyone knew what Fibber McGee's closet looked like. We had only to think about opening the door to my brother's bedroom.

Amos and Andy and Sapphire and Kingfish are lost to us forever. We've become uptight about racial and ethnic stereotypes. There will never be another Rochester who said with eyes rolling upward (you just knew they were rolling upward): "Yes, Mr. Benny." What higher accolade than to be called "dear and faithful friend?" Yet, if Tonto were here today, would he say "Kemo sabe?" It is a shame to tuck these memories away because they are embarrassing. Tuck them away, we do, until someone like Richard starts talking about Froggie the Gremlin. Thanks, Dick.

Now for a little quiz to see how good you really are:

1. Daytime radio soap operas were usually how many minutes long?
2. Stella Dallas came from what kind of town in England? (*My error.*) (If you say it with the right inflection you get extra points.)
3. Who were "The Riders of the Purple Sage?"
4. What was the "one and only cereal that was shot from guns?" (Extra credit for the name of the person who wrote the tune.) day of the week did it air?)
6. What kind of car did Jack Benny drive? What instrument did he play? What four-letter word started all of his answers?
7. What was the name of the undertaker on *The Great Gildersleeve*?
8. "You'll wonder where the yellow went" when you do what? Extra credit for what show it sponsored.
9. Fill in the Blank: Hen-*ree*—*Hen*-ree —!
10. What were the two colors representing NBC in the early 40's?
11. What "hit" show was the precursor of today's Top 40?
12. What cigarette sponsored *Dragnet* on early radio. (Clue: it was not Chesterfield.)
13. Baby Snooks and Barbara Streisand have what in common?
14. Why are you entering this contest when we all know you can't possibly be old enough to remember these things?

Nostalgia quiz results...

Three people did so magnificently in the nostalgia quiz about radio days that they have left me somewhat red-faced! I really did try to make those questions esoteric. I guess some other kids of my vintage hung around the radio instead of the malt shop.

Caught in my error, Paul Burch, of Hixon, Tennessee, pointed out to me that he didn't know a thing about where Stella Dallas

came from (actually neither do I—perhaps Dallas?) But *Our Gal Sunday* came "from a little mining town in the west" and that she was married to a "wealthy and titled Englishman."

He reminded me of the exact words—that apparently we both listened to every day—"Can this girl, from a little mining town in the west, find happiness as the wife of a wealthy and titled Englishman?"

As Mr. Burch points out—he really doesn't care. Paul didn't know that the Riders of the Purple Sage were Gene Autry's backup but he came close. Mr. Burch also informed me that the undertaker on *The Great Gildersleeve*'s "formal" name was "Digby O'Dell." I was thinking of this nickname: "Digger!" (*Appropos*, don't you think?)

One of the most popular radio shows was *Dragnet*: no one remembered Fatima cigarettes. I guess people are trying to forget cigarettes in general.

Mr. Burch says that he admits to being old enough to "barely" answer the questions and spent a week around his Tennessee home trying to get answers to the rest of them. Thank you, Paul Burch!

Claire West, a visitor from Connecticut to Cedar Key, also did very well. She knew all about the *Lucky Strike Hit Parade*, Henry Aldrich, Baby Snooks and Barbara Streisand (the Fannie Brice connection); Pepsodent toothpaste; Jack Benny's "Well"; his Maxwell and his violin. Claire says that the reason she wrote in to enter this contest is that "there isn't anything else to do in Cedar Key." Well...!

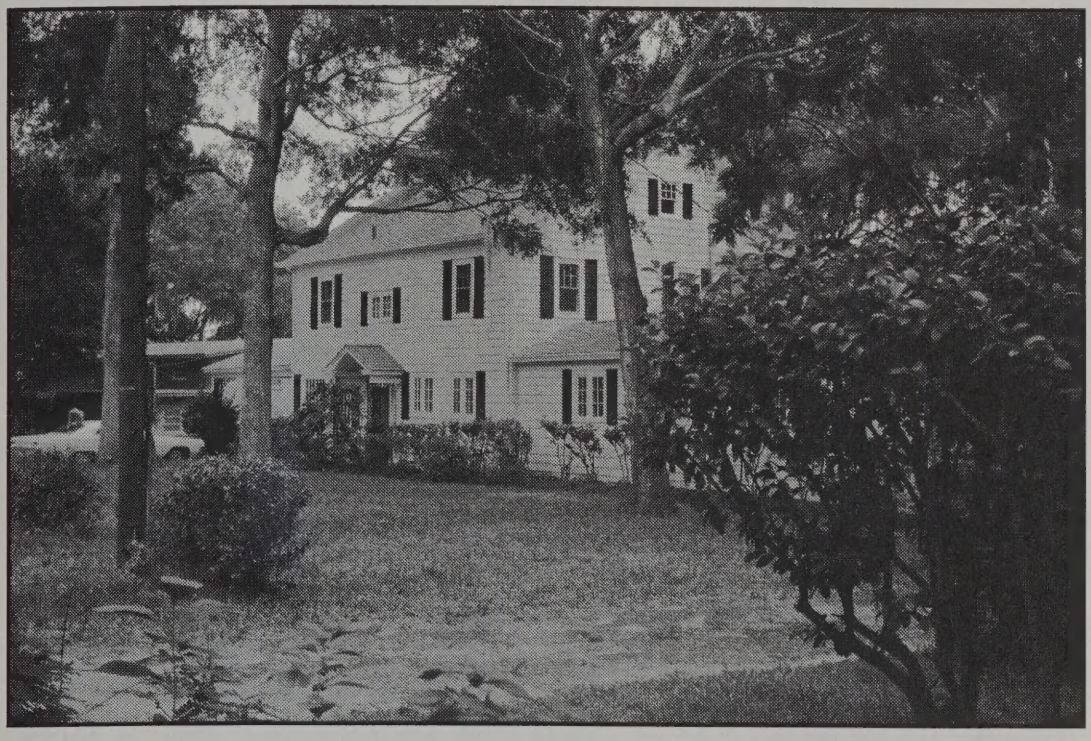
Robbie Armistead, whom we know as a Cedar Key devotee, wrote in from Chiefland and was the first to point out that there was no Question No. 14. (Gee Whiz! That's what comes from teaching college students!) (The answers were better than the question, 'tis sure.) He also got most of the questions.

Nobody knew what two colors represented NBC in early radio days. They were the Red and the Blue, but for the life of me I cannot remember the reason for this. I'm thinking that it is because there were no other networks. Some little bell is ringing, there is a scritch-scratch at the back of my mind that tells me that one was a news network and the other the entertainment format. You'd better believe I wasn't born yet when this was going on.

My dad and I were radio buffs. He knew everything there was and is to know. Unfortunately, postage to the pearly gates is beyond my means.

Did I forget some answers? Quaker Puffed Wheat and Rice; Tchaikovsky (1812 Overture); *Lux Radio Theater* (Lux Soap-ha ha) (8 PM Sundays); *My Friend Irma*; and *Amos and Andy*. Daytime soaps were 15 minutes long (and sponsored by soap companies. Remember the days before detergents?)

The Orlando Days



Our "wonderful" house in Orlando—Circa 1972

I have three sons, David, Jim and Steven, each very different. Husband David and I are blessed that they like each other—really. They also seem to like their parents—really.

Our home during most of our sons' growing-up years was a wonderful 1926 colonial on a street with a wonderful name—Waterwitch Drive. A "waterwitch" is a diviner of water—one of those crazy folks walking around with twigs, waiting for the twigs to do whatever they do when water is down there in the ground. We didn't need to divine any water since our home rested next to Little Lake Conway, just south of the Orlando, Florida city limits.

I call the house "wonderful" with some qualification since

frame houses well into middle age require constant attention, resulting in much self-educating in such subjects as plumbing—without flooding the house—and wiring—without burning the house down.

The house was huge—at least to us—with a large basement (unusual for Florida), a full attic-game room (the home of son David's rock band "Amadeus"), and a garage apartment (the home of husband David's photo escapades—and guest quarters).

We were sad (and relieved) when we sold the house shortly after our move to Cedar Key in 1987.

By 1987, two of our sons were out of the nest, and Steven, the youngest, entered his senior year of high school at Cedar Key School, in a class of four.

Steven was never a scholar, but he was not afraid to try continuing his education beyond high school after graduation from Cedar Key School. A lover of animals, he discovered the zoo management program at Santa Fe Community College. He and the animals bonded wonderfully—not so the more academic subjects, such as advanced math. After several semesters of struggle, Steven found another career path—the open sea and the merchant marine life of a sailor.

My children—and especially Steven—were the subjects of many of my newspaper columns since my writing seemed to drift to what I knew and loved best. Steven, being the last son at home—or close to home—during my newspaper writing career, starred in a number of columns. The other two sons, while not getting equal time, still got enough mention—too much according to them.

Home Alone? (Don't Count on It!)

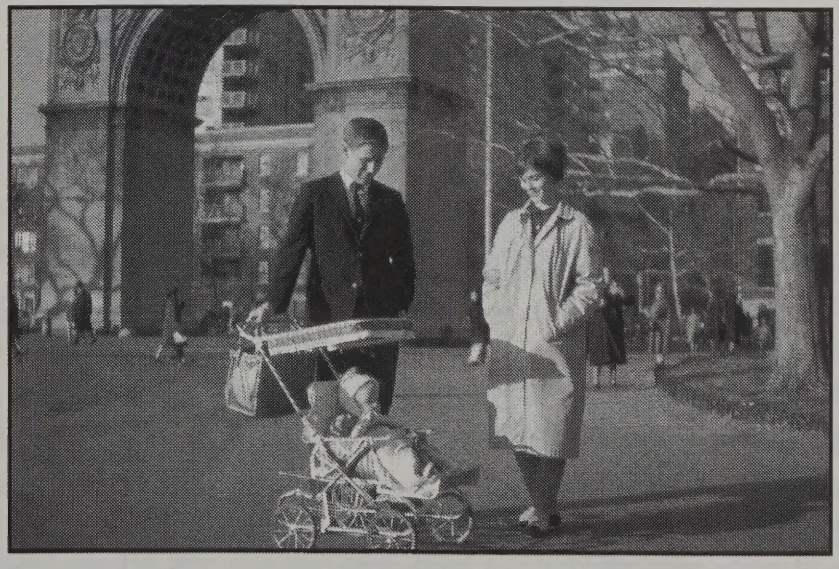
June 1993

Our son David was exactly eight days old when I left him home with his first sitter, his father. We had an interesting schedule in those days revolving around two class schedules at the University of Florida, availability of one car, a job and one brand new baby. I'd hand off the infant at 6 AM with dry diaper and a face full of Gerbers (mine). Dave sterilized the supply of bottles and juiced the child at 10 AM. This procedure was reversed at noon when I got the

honors of re-feeding, bathing and reupholstering the baby's seat. No wonder the kid still takes baths at noon or midnight.

Our baby saw no outside sitters until he reached the ripe old age of four months when we entered into an alliance with other Washington Square West residents and "traded" babies for evenings out. (Dave was in graduate law school at New York University and we were living in student housing.) My child was always perfectly well behaved (of course!) until he had to share a playpen with Buster or Tiffany. We enlisted childless Eve a few times. Eve vowed to lean on us less after the experience. Carol (also child-naïve) upped her dosage of Ortho-Novum. They took good care of Davy, at least better than I did. While I was diapering him one day, he decided he'd learn to do a back flip, off the bed and into the radiator pipes, right under my maternal eye. We called the medical corps, horrified NYU med students, who had never seen a leg that small or a burn that big.

I'd forgotten the asparagus on the two burner range and the apartment was smoking. How was I to explain that baby's legs don't smell like asparagus? Not funny. I was a terrible mother.



Our threesome in Washington Square Park,
Greenwich Village, New York City—Spring 1965

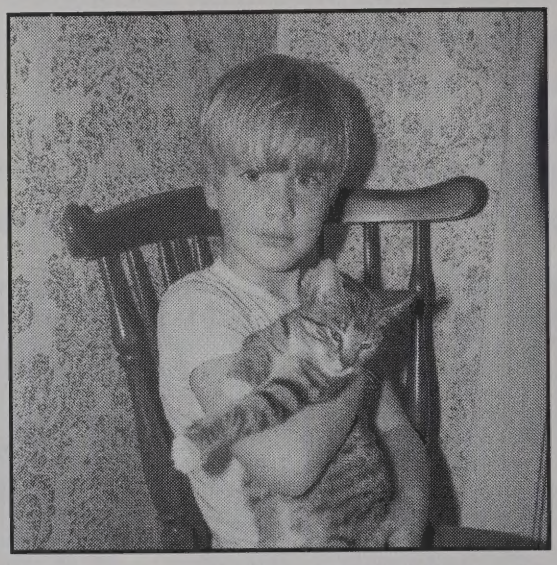
I often walked the streets of Greenwich Village with the baby in the stroller. Matrons stopped me to offer sage advice: "You idiot! The baby is *cold*!" That was after I'd missed the curb because of the snow and had to pick Davy up out of the gutter. I was trying to get

the snow out of his ears! The time came when his little arms needed a strait jacket. I stopped going into stores. We'd take long rides on the subway, breathing in the nice underground aroma of Manhattan.

I'd take him to the park and we'd sit with nannies with their charges bundled into glossy black prams. The nannies, not the babies, were contentedly sucking pacifiers or thumbs. My person was reading the Help Wanted ads.

When Baby was old enough to walk, the grass was green. He hated grass! He's been a city boy ever since. (This is the child who became a landscape specialist!)

In 1965, after Dave received his graduate law degree, we moved to Orlando (Dave's hometown) and he joined an established Orlando law firm.



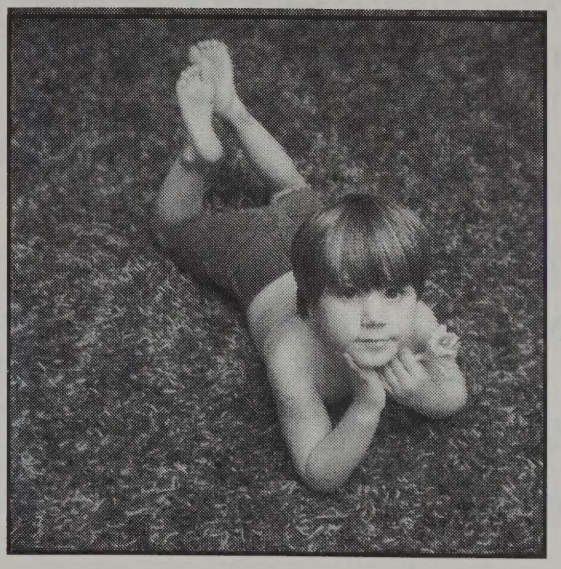
David Wilson Roquemore, III & Mush-Cat—1972

Our first sitter in Orlando was the daughter of a neighbor. Stephanie later moved to Arkansas where she raises wild animals and shoes horses. Her brother took over when her cheerleading duties pre-empted sitting. Reid was a good sitter and a male influence. Davy liked to play little boy games like Spray-The-Sitter-While-He's-Dozing-On-The-Couch.

Davy often threatened my career as a good mother. My native talents—ending with the birth process—involved arguing with Dad over minor aspects of child raising. For example, should a five-year-old should be allowed to use a fork? We discussed plexi-glassing all the windows after Davy rode his little wheeled horsey through a

glass door. Neil Armstrong was landing on the moon—Neil made it, but you couldn't prove it by us. I suppose you could have said that we were overprotective parents. We reversed the locks on Davy's room. He had a habit of raiding cabinets in the wee hours; he had the flexibility of Bobo The Chimp and the ability to pick locks.

In the late 1960's, Davy was joined by two brothers, Jim and Steven—and we moved to a larger house, the "wonderful" house on Waterwitch Drive.



James Michael Roquemore—1972

I "lost" Jim, then about 2 1/2 years old, one fall day. Babies #2 and #3 were napping and Davy was at school for at least another hour. It was too quiet on the upstairs front. Baby #2 was not in his bed. There was a very real fear, since Jim loved the water and we were lake front. He was a true two-year-old Pisces. The neighborhood rallied and so did a deputy sheriff—and then a bicycle brigade of neighborhood youngsters.

A sharp-eyed neighbor saw an upstairs bathroom curtain move and I dashed inside the house. Jim met me at the top of the stairs: "Mommy? Mommy mad?" Mommy didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Jim was dressed in a black slip, pantyhose, with dark blue eye-shadow covering his big brown eyes with a slash of red lipstick for emphasis. He'd taken cosmetics into an oversized shower stall and had been amusing himself for hours.

By the time I re-entered the work force the State of Florida was

providing day care in the form of public school. On the first day of my new job, teenage David III got his first and only case of the flu. My supervisor forced me from my desk where I felt safe and warm and somewhat sane—back into the real world of motherhood.

We began taking vacations. Grandparents got long lists of menus (which they prudently and patiently ignored) and our children became more independent than ever. They did rather hate us when we returned home.

We grew into a phase when the children traveled with us. We were out of the sitter mode and didn't know where to begin looking for sitters. Our next door neighbor had three daughters, Joyce, Lois and Mary Ann, just stair-steps in age from my boys. They would sit for us—each in turn. Joyce helped us open Disney World in 1971 and went with us for about three years thereafter, when we took the boys each New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. She would take them on rides while we did the more eclectic stuff.

My boys grew up and the sitters were no more, not to say they would not have been useful. Leaving town for several days, we admonished Davy, then nineteen and of legal age, about partying while we were gone: "We don't want to return home and find the house littered with beer cans." Davy replied in all sincerity, "No way, Mom!" True to his promise the house was completely free of beer cans on our return. We then opened the refrigerator to find the remains of a pony keg.

Steven Thomas Roquemore—1972

House Rules

February 1990

While my children were growing up we had a minimum of house rules. An anarchist by nature, I resent rules. Give me a rule and it is an invitation to rebellion. Still, I had enough sense of social awareness to know that civilization of the little brutes is important. We developed a code of politeness and respect: "If we aren't helping, we are hurting." Most religions espouse this philosophy, so I felt well grounded.

I wonder sometimes what the HRS would have to say if they heard me back in the early 1970's:

"You rip another leaf off of that tree and I will rip your arm off!"

"Tell me another *story* and you will eat this whole bar of soap, not just taste it!"

And finally, in the teen years, "If you want to chew tobacco, go join a baseball club."

It wasn't always pleasant. I had locked the kids out of the house the day Jimmy broke his leg and the kindly old gentleman brought him to my back door in a wheelbarrow. Ah! the *guilt* that belongs to Mothers alone!

It's a time-honored tradition for women to discuss every minute of their labors and childbirth. It is equally as satisfying to dwell on the rearing of the self-same children. Now, for the first time, here is the *fathers'* side (from the mother's earshot):

"Steven! Give me that stupid crutch! You don't need it!" (Splash into the Cumberland River goes Steven's crutch.) "You can walk just fine." (He did.)

(David III, on the road to Alaska): "Are we going to listen to *another* Joni Mitchell tape?"

"David, stop your griping or your seat will eject. Remember the last James Bond movie?"

"But *Dad*..."

"Do you want to be sent home by parcel post?"

"Jim, if you don't stop throwing that boomerang in this motorhome I won't be able to see to drive."

"Heh Heh Heh!"

"Jim, please don't open the refrigerator. Something might fall

into the camera gear. Oh no! Blackberry preserves!" (It did—*open.*)

Dads and moms have away of relegating these episodes to Hall of Fame status. They weren't funny at the time.

I tell the story of how I threw a pillow at my eldest when he pulled down his diaper and spewed into the floor furnace. Phew! And how I climbed a 30-foot orange tree four-days post-postpartum to retrieve him balancing in the crotch of the tree, but left a new baby on a couch while doing so.

The children are grown and fine men. They don't really like my telling their stories to the world. Somehow the philosophy worked. They are nice people. They don't preach or screech. They are mellow before their years.

We still don't have too many house rules. Mom doesn't believe in them and if the kids aren't civilized by now, well....

Remember the Beatles?

May 1989

I owe the Beatles. Before them, little boys wore neatly cropped, even buzz-style haircuts. Catching my toddlers to perform this monthly ritual was akin to holding Miss Petunia (Dave calls her "The Cat from Hell") down for a flea spray job. I was clawed and bitten, with the neighbors considering calling HRS (for my well-being). Heaven has seen no fury like my eldest son under the clippers. After the Beatles, I retired the dreaded chainsaw and let their hair grow. I felt something like Delilah when I suggested scissors and a mixing bowl. They were patient enough with this process for several years. I was just getting good at the craft when they discovered *stylists* (at $13 a clip with blow dry extra). I'm thinking maybe they could just braid it. (*I was ahead of my time, fashion wise.*)

David III entered into his musician phase and no self-respecting rocker had less than shoulder-length hair. He would have his neatly trimmed at a salon but after a session in our hot attic (where his band practiced) his head looked more like my cedar mop. Pleading did no good. He was fifteen. One day he bounded into the kitchen: "Hey Mom! Look at my hair!" How could I help not look! His straight blond shoulder-length hair was now a mass of tight

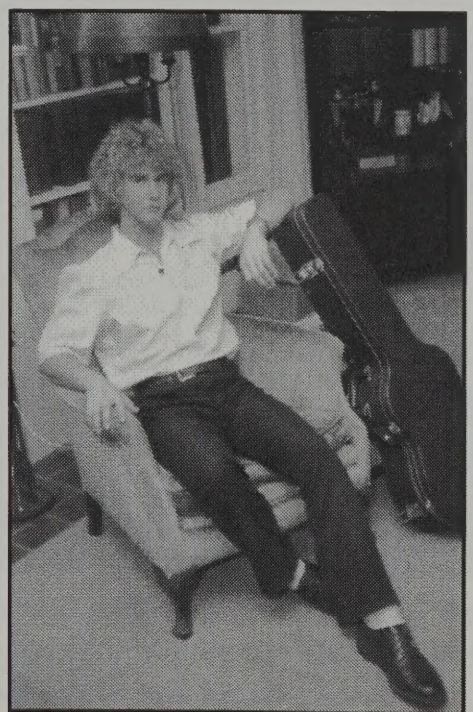
curls the circumference of a washtub. I was hoping it was a wig. It wasn't. Afro hairdos are hard to maintain, especially if you don't have Afro-hair. He had to purchase special picks and pomades and mousses and regular permanents to keep "the look." Grandmothers pleaded with me to do something! Short of dragging out my vintage clippers in the middle of the night, there was little I could do. My only stipulation was that it be kept clean and that he pay for his own permanents.

A few months later came another kitchen shock: "Where is your hair?"

"Oh that. I got it cut and straightened." Here was this divinely preppy-looking young man standing in front of me (with a part on the side, no less). He actually had ears. I hadn't seen them in years! They were nice ears!

My glee was short-lived. A week or so later I mentioned that he had something smeared on his face.

"Mom, I'm growing a mustache."



Davy, the aspiring rock star

Yesterday' Yuppies—or Has-Beens Who Still Think They Are

December 1989

About a quarter of a century ago, I casually mentioned to my husband of the day—who happens to be the same one I've grown attached to in the course of the millennium—that I'd really like to have a little Mercedes. Dave, who tends to be a little more serious than I (and more sensible), clutched my hand and said: "But dearest darling sweetheart," (he really didn't use those words), "we haven't paid off the mortgage on the baby that you wanted *last* year! Besides, I won't name any child Mercedes." I could tell this conversation was deteriorating rapidly.

My brother suggested that I buy his army-issue Jeep: It was a convertible with four on the floor. I could be the Nellie Forbush of Orange County, Florida. Tommy had a sense of the absurd.

A year or so later Dave suggested that my driving him to work every day was getting to be tedious. He would arrive at his office with Gerber's oatmeal on his paisley tie and a damp spot on his knee. With my inimitable sense of timing I suggested that we get a second car. It was a good idea! The only problem was that David wanted an MGTD, not a Mercedes 190SL. We compromised.

My Mercedes had a little rust on her underbelly and was painted a chalky red. The minute I sat behind the steering wheel I knew I was born to the world of sports cars! Her *Ver-room* quickened my heart! I was seventeen again! I put the mortgaged baby in a car seat and off we would go to the supermarket! The car, like the baby, squeaked and leaked but I loved them both with all my heart, and David with everything else.

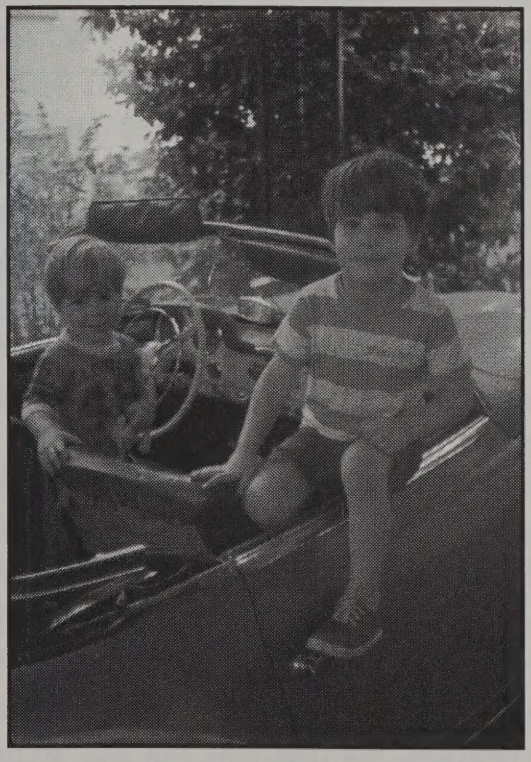
Within a very short time it was becoming increasingly apparent that I was not going to be able to fit behind the steering wheel much longer. This was a two-seater car and we were going to need three seats. I was back to the family sedan and Dave had inherited "Baby" by default (de fault was mine!).

My baby (son Jim) was born and grew up. Dave's baby (car Mecedes) got tired and sat in the garage for quite a few years. Then the family business took an interest in her, painted her Quaker State Motor Oil green, fitted her out with duel carburetors, a new lid and a few other expensive items like an engine. She made cameo appear-

ances at shows like tractor pulls and parades. "Baby" sat in the mother's front yard for a year or so shrouded, until the neighbors were beginning to think there was a body or something inside. "Baby" went to the back yard!

This weekend Dave put "Baby" on the road for the first time in probably fifteen years. Thank you, Highway Patrol, for not looking too closely. She came home to roost in Cedar Key. And for the first time in twenty-two years, Mama has the car keys!

A present day comment: Today a beautiful silver and black, Baby rests in our garage in the Blue Ridge Mountains. She has been promised the infamous Crooked Road of Southwest Virginia just as soon as her brakes are working. Whoopee!



Steven & Jim using "Baby" as a Jungle Gym. Baby is still part of the family, although about as inactive as the owners.

Maids Are Just Not Her Thing

November 1988

There was a time in my life that I wanted (indeed *needed*) a maid to help me with the housework and children. Actually what I

needed was a slave but my lawyer husband informed me that I was born one hundred years too late. Dave agreed that it might be nice to have the dishes washed once a week and the living room shoveled out periodically.

I began interviewing maids. "Mary" came over to "inspect." She promptly told me my house was a mess. "Yes," I agreed, "that is why I need help." She informed me that I needed a new vacuum cleaner, a central air conditioning system and a downstairs closet for her supplies. So far, Mary had cost me several thousand dollars and she didn't like stairs.

"Bertha" worked out. Bertha liked children, wasn't too fussy and got the job done. Bertha also sold Avon on the side and I was her best customer. When Dave had to move his clothes out of the closet to find room for yet another "blusher," Bertha went bye-bye.

What really sent Bertha packing was when, on a cold winter's rainy morning, she informed me that I would have to start picking her up at the bus stop "like the other ladies do." Well, my dear, my baby had a cold and I wasn't about to take him out in the rain. Get back on the bus.

"Henrietta" was a gem. She was, however, frightened of anything on four legs or crawling. In my house her worst fears were realized. Not only did we have a dog, a cat, several birds, and a healthy crop of American cockroaches, we had an outdoors that promised alligators, snakes and all kinds of creepy crawlies. Henrietta would not allow the children out of doors and she herself ventured only on cemented walkways. I didn't fire Henrietta. She quit for more manicured pastures.

I gave up trying to get help, knowing full well that I could handle that house myself. Ah, the confidence of youth! Dave agreed to take the fourteen shirts he wore each week to the laundry to be washed, starched, pressed. As this was the late sixties and early seventies, rag-tag clothes were in style for the kids. They didn't mind. I found a nearby day care center for those times when I needed to get away.

Enter "Helen." My motives for hiring Helen are still unclear. That she needed work is true. That she hated housework was obvious. She was affable and affordable. She was disastrous with the laundry to the point that my boys learned to do their own laundry on weekends when she wasn't around.

They padlocked their rooms. She hated clutter and hid things. I found lipsticks in the bread box. Receipts in the refrigerator. Dave called her "the squirrel." She was the only maid that I ever knew that would leave typewritten messages for me. She spent her lunch hour typing on the IBM. I was, and am, genuinely fond of Helen.

Helen liked to talk. Being something of a yakker myself, it was dangerous for us to try to work together. She could not fold clothes and talk at the same time. When she and Steve got together it was a lost cause. She rearranged his room so many times that he was hard pressed to find his bed. She invented antennas for his TV and they drew pictures together. A lovely lady, Helen.

Early on in Helen's career at my house, I determined to do this right and legal. I started filing with the IRS and Social Security Administration for her wages. No matter that I have a tax expert in the family, I was to do this myself.

Dave sometimes overestimates my abilities. It wasn't long before the penalties were equaling her wages. Did you ever try to call the toll free IRS number? They must have the feature of "permanent busy signal," so I started writing them letters.

This served to flag my account and I was on "permanent audit." We made arrangements for my stay in the Federal Penitentiary but instead, all I got were more threatening letters. I discussed this with Helen and we both agreed that she was costing me a great deal in mental anguish. She politely resigned from the dubious honor of being my maid.

Two and one half years later, the Social Security office is still trying to figure out where I went wrong. I've confessed every sin. Fraud is not my thing. Maids are not my thing. Perhaps a robot that does windows?

Come with Me to Zee Darkroom, Dahlink!

January 1990

"Everyone needs a hobby," I stated profoundly about twenty years ago. David didn't enjoy golf and refused to get into my amateur radio clique. He wouldn't play bridge and aerobic dancing had not been invented. I couldn't see him crocheting or painting landscapes a la Winston. Twenty years ago Dave didn't wallow in the glory of a sprouting pepper plant either. I was determined to

find a hobby for him!

It had to have a certain artistic, yet macho, image. There had to be a hefty dose of science, creativity and still be cheap enough for us to afford. (That excluded race cars, fast women and collecting Faberge Easter eggs.)

Years before, I had a taste of making pictures with my brother Jack. Jack would lock (our only) bathroom door and make mystic potions in the sink. (Jack is now an honest to goodness chemist.) Jack needed an assistant. I was available. We'd throw a rug under the door. The rest of the family could walk around with clenched knees for hours. We were having fun. I don't know how scientific we were since looking at some of our prints forty years later it seems we were short on some fixer. Or was that we shortchanged the short stop?

It was the Christmas of 1970 that I introduced David to photography. It was my undoing!

One of the kids and I answered a classified ad: "Darkroom equipment for sale." The price for what was offered seemed okay since I really didn't know what things cost anyway. I wrote my check and signed it. It was only then that the gentleman roared, "Are you *David's* Wife?" (Unknown to me, the seller was one of David's good friends from work!) I was wondering whether to do a Heimlich Maneuver or simply nod "Yes." He led me back to the darkroom by the hand and threw everything else into boxes! How many thermometers does one photographer really need? (Jack and I usually put our finger in the liquid and gauged accordingly.)

That year David converted the guest apartment kitchen over our garage into his darkroom, and thus began the quest for the perfect picture—and years of fun following the star.

Converting a full room in Orlando to closet space in Cedar Key has been interesting.

High-tech drum processing isn't nearly as much fun as sloshing the chemicals about in trays. Thus, when we do it together we opt for the old fashioned way: the sloshing. We open the laundry area to the contaminants. I yell, "Time me!" and he plops yet another exposure into my developing tray. "Ya wanna see it or can it just go ahead and fix?" There's a whole lot of laughing going on in this corridor when we make pictures together. We're not able to see the grain of the film without jeweler's glasses anymore. I'm night blind

and have to wait until the eyes get adjusted to my homemade black-out curtains.

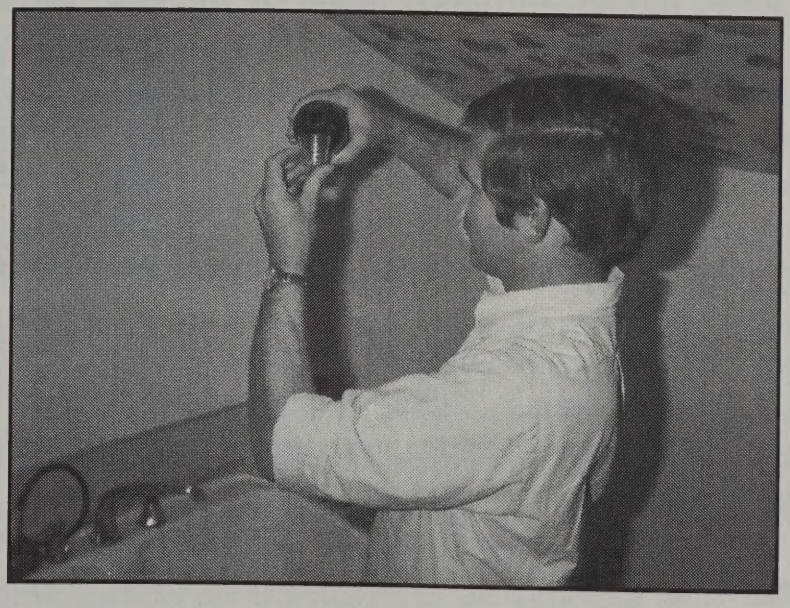
I argue composition and placement. David argues paper and exposure. He tells me that what I want can't be done and I tell him that he can do anything (that is true).

"Why can't we take that 2 1/4 x 2 1/4 and make it into a 4 x 6 without cutting somebody's head off?"

"Sweetie? Did you pass geometry? You are fanatic," he exclaims.

"No worse than you who insists that the snow be totally white in the print."

Neither of us is satisfied but it is "good enuf fer guv-ment work."



Dave in the darkroom in the garage apartment
of our "wonderful" Orlando house

Go! Go! Go Danny Go!
Danny B.Goode
February 1991

About ten years ago, I had the "privilege" of being resident groupie and den mother to a rock 'n' roll band. My son had egg-crated the ceiling of the attic, carpeted a portion of the walls

and flooring, and installed a mini-stage and speakers that were as large as our outdoor storage shed. Mystic wires hung from door jambs and the reflections off the microphones were blinding. To be very honest, I didn't enter this sanctum sanctorum very often. I was afraid I might catch something—like deafness! Or a terminal case of long-haired weirdness. My duties as "housemother" included fielding phone calls from girlfriends. This got old after awhile since the "studio" was on the third floor and the boys didn't want to be interrupted anyway. I've often thought it was a shame that we weren't recycling aluminum cans in those days—we could have paid off the mortgage five years earlier.

I've never complained about those rock-band-in-the-attic years because I knew exactly where my kids were and there was only one way out: down the stairs and past me. They more or less complied with my stated morals—no beer, booze or smoking, and the boys generally policed themselves. It came then, as a surprise—and a grand irritation—to be confronted by a delegation of parents who were not concerned so much about these obvious temptations but because they thought this music was evil. For someone who knew every verse of "Stairway To Heaven" and "Can't Get No Satisfaction" and still could look my God in the eye, I was a little baffled and not a little annoyed.

"Have you ever played any of those records backwards?"

I had to admit I hadn't. "Why would I want to do that?"

"To hear the satanic message, of course." (This logic eluded me since I didn't want to get any satanic messages.)

The band continued on for several more years, with personnel that changed on a weekly basis. Davy insisted that they needed a new drummer. Frankly, I thought they already had one drummer too many. As Ringo was not available for hire that week, David called in his friend Danny. I'd known Danny since he was in the second grade.

His mom and I were friends. It wasn't so much that I screened my kids' friends, but I did feel comfortable with a kid whose socks were as familiar with my washing machine as were my own. There was only one thing wrong with this arrangement. Danny played the drums about as well as I sang. The rocker on the pressure cooker had a better beat and the dog scratching had a more appealing rhythm. Danny, however, had a quality that is called "loud." Loud

was good until the band moved into a subtler, gentler and more lucrative folk-country repertoire. Exit Dan. There was, however, no exit to the forged friendship. A black eye or two maybe.

Rock 'n' roll melted into folk and then classical music. It's fun to look at what our band members do for a living today. One is a super-salesman. Another is a health department inspector. One is an engineer. At least one must be in jail. One died. Most are married, some already divorced. One studied music, seriously. He just completed his first symphony, a Requiem, and it was received with rave reviews. He's being interviewed by the Cleveland School of Music for a graduate scholarship. Danny, this lady salutes you. You were the "different drummer" responding to your own music. See what happens when you let kids play in the attic?

A Stitch Loose? Why Not a Couple of Whole Rows

May 1993

A dear friend runs around town with a bumper sticker that asks the question: "Why Be Normal?" (For awhile under that sticker snicker was another proclaiming: "Vote For Perot!" The juxtaposition was just too much not to take to heart.) While I am not a bumper sticker person I have found that they are about the only things that either don't fall off or get ripped off cars. Our minds may change but messages on bumpers live on forever. If we keep a car long enough, our whole life can flash before our eyes at the car wash. Some stickers are mandated by powers that be at certain institutions and judging from my car windows I am extremely loyal to the University of Florida, the University of Central Florida parking lot, Valencia Community College, Emory University, and the Florida and Appalachian Trails. Please don't even ask why one needs a parking sticker to hike on a trail.

I'm especially fond of the UCF sticker. That thing cost me a thousand or so dollars. It serves as a reminder (complete with the year) of my *folie-du-brain* when I thought I'd pick up a couple of courses and work on a doctorate. The first step was to get my academic credentials in order. The counselors at that august institution told me that I'd have to repeat the Graduate Record Exam. "Okay.

That should be fun!" Right here those close to me, caring people all, should have been alerted that the stitches were unraveling. Six or so months later, with help from my then teenage sons, I proved once again that the little gray cells could still figure out how fast trains had to be going to crash headlong when they were on the same track coming from different directions. I read faster and more critically and knew far many more words than I did the first time around. (Some of these words are still not allowed on testing material.)

Test scores in hand, I approached an academic counselor who resembled Miss Teenage America.

"Mrs. Roquemore, what do you want to do with your doctoral degree?"

"You mean I have to *do* something with it? Like *work*?" To me, Doctor of Philosophy meant that I could sit around and think.

"One needs to be on a 'track'…" This was sounding more and more like those two trains from Duluth and Peoria. Miss Teenage invited me to make an appointment with the Education Department. Apparently there were a lot of people over there that didn't have any idea of what they were doing with their degrees either.

Interesting thing about the University of Central Florida. At least in those days they refused to label or number buildings. They were all stamped out of concrete cubes with reflective-glass mirrored windows. It was impossible even to peer inside and see if there were beakers or maps or cadavers inside for clues. (I'd been saved at the University of Florida by this method on more than one occasion.) Of course, I *was* a Gainesville snob, and these buildings, just like their denizens, weren't old enough to have either ivy or moss growing on them.

The counselor at the College of Education wasn't sure what to do with me. No way did I want to be a principal of a high school! "You mean spending all day with adolescents *voluntarily*?" My stitches might be slipping, but I haven't lost the pattern book yet!

"Well, then, you don't want the Administration Route. How about Counseling?" How about counseling?

"Sir, right now, I spend four to six hours on the phone every day keeping my friends, relatives and perfect strangers from jumping off roofs and balconies. Do you want me to teach the class or enroll in that 'track'?" I did try to tell him about an idea that I had—

but as usual, it had never been done, there was no protocol and no track.

What I wanted to do—and was willing to put out my own and David's hard cash to study—was how to teach nurses to teach. That sounded like it should be part of the Department of Education. My counselor thought it should be in the Nursing Department. I'm thinking: "Do I need this?"

Former colleagues (and patients) insisted that I was the best teacher they'd ever had. I was so tired of watching nurses beg and cajole—and more often, more easily, just do the tasks for a person—than have them learn to do for himself or herself. Nurses don't mind being "maids" when the occasion arises, but it doesn't do anyone any good in the long run. Besides, who in this day and age can afford full-time nursing care? Families and responsible caregivers have to be taught. (One of my most able students was a nine-year-old country child who learned to titrate insulin for his diabetic double-amputee grandmother. Mother was not available mentally.)

I found the registration office and enrolled in three courses which according to the university would make this study viable (over the next millennium?): Pathogenesis of Communicable Diseases (which brought me up to date on everything I ever forgot about chromosomes and mutant ninja bugs), the History of Higher Education in America (which I helped create), and Basic Computer. The last course proved my undoing. It proved just how old I really was. It proved that finding that temporary building in a sea of concrete cubes wasn't enough. After my first unsuccessful attempts to program a blackjack game and re-organize the Library of Congress on my home computer I admitted defeat: I was not, after all, college material. I'd never see the *Jeopardy* "Tournament of Champions" from the winners' circle. I'd never be a Gator Cheerleader. Probably, I'd never learn to twirl a baton or do the wave at a football game. Sadness overwhelmed me. More than that, I was resolute in my hatred for bits and bytes and anything that started out saying "user friendly."

Minutes and years have passed. I no longer put pins into the doll that I made of that kid who wrote me the cryptic message: "The onus is on you to do better on the next program…" By this time, he probably has tenure and a long gray beard (or is wisely coaching a Nordic ski class at Disney World).

I like to think about the words of a beautiful lady (also the wife of Paul Newman!) who said something like this: "Every time I hear of someone having it all put together, I know that they have slipped a stitch." Joan Woodward, I thank you. My husband David thanks you. All of us who have ever unraveled the selvage thank you.

The Cedar Key Days

Many of my Beacon articles drew inspiration from the distant past but just as many or more reflected the current everyday events of my life, some strange, some just everyday. At the start of my *Beacon* career two of my sons were out of the nest, Davy working in the Orlando area and Jim in college in Georgia. Steven left home in 1988, after graduating from Cedar Key School, for the hallowed halls of Santa Fe Community College in Gainesville.

That "Will o' The Wisp" Memory (a Postscript)

February 1993

One recent Saturday afternoon, I was talking to my friend Roger LaVoie on the front porch of one of Cedar Key's "Painted Ladies." I didn't correct him then, but *his* version of how he and I met in 1960 or 1961 was not mine.

Today if you watch the traffic on State Road 24 coming into Cedar Key, you will notice that half the visitors bear Alachua County tags: translate that to mean Gainesville. College life is "Stress City," even though no one could look at us as students and tell that we were anorectic, hyped up, depressed or going simply mad. Chances are we didn't know it ourselves.

I don't know what possessed me on that given day, but I waltzed myself across campus from my sorority house to the old Florida Union Building and volunteered at the *Florida Alligator* (the campus newspaper)—we called it the "Agitator"!). The place smelled of old cigarettes and burnt coffee. Though I knew zilch about Gator sports, I was interviewed by Bill Buchalter, the sports

editor. He assigned me to interview a person named Roger LaVoie. "Okay, Susie, you tail this guy and find out what he is doing for homecoming decorations on the ATΩ [*Alpha Tau Omega, for you non-Greeks*] house."

I was impressed! Face it, I was scared! This person was known to be one of the most creative geniuses on campus and a *bit* high strung. They were sending an eighteen-year-old into the lion's den and enjoying the anticipation of the slaughter. I didn't mind it at all that I had a perfectly *official* excuse to visit the prestigious ATΩ house. Eventually, I met the mastermind of the "Wave-Nosori" homecoming float. (We were playing Tulane's Green Wave that year!)

My story did indeed get front page and I think ATΩ won the competition. My sorority helped build the scaffolding and under the man's watchful eye, we stuck petal paper into chicken wire framing. I was asked out for coffee by the man and thence began one of the most roller-coaster non-affairs of the century. It just so happened that he was David Roquemore's roommate. David at the time was paying court to one of my sorority sisters and it became natural that the four of us would pile into Dave's two-seater MG and do things like watch the sun not come up over Flagler Beach or do sophomoric things like drink too much 3.2 beer at Ted's Tavern (later housing a bicycle emporium) (*and in 2016 just another construction site*). The rest is history.

That's the way I remember it.

The other side of the story: "You came into my office at the Seminole (the University of Florida's yearbook) wanting a job." Roger was Editor at the time and there was no way I was going to ask his female co-editor Bonnie for a job. She was a talented, beautiful girl who (to my way of thinking) had all the qualities of a Queen Cobra. My job became "smuggling" copy into the Seminole office and being his "go-fer." At this time, he wasn't an officially-enrolled student. I was. Bonnie never caught on to what was happening and the yearbook (1961) did get published. He credits himself with introducing Dave to me. True enough.

Indeed Roger took part in our wedding as a groomsman. David and I attended his wedding as well. We would meet again in New York City where Roger was plying his trade as an ad man (as in *Mad Men*). We lost track of each other as even good friends do—when

sometime in 1966 (or was it 1967 or 1968?) came a knock at our Orlando front door. My toddler David came running back to me. "Mommy! There's a hippie at the door." Roger had been doing gigs as a guitarist-songwriter in our own adopted Greenwich Village.

Another part of the story: Roger and his family lived in Cedar Key for about five years. He turned his creative efforts to remodeling some of the homes about town. Look at Second Street: Peggy Herrick's "Cats" were hand cut by his jig saw. See the Pink House with the Widow's Walk: another masterwork. His own house at 5th and F was lovingly restored. He took on a modern project and designed and built the Spa at Cedar Cove. His daughters were students at Cedar Key School. Mom Susan watched out for my cats while we were out of town. We were family.

The lure of Nashville struck again and Roger was called back to songwriting. He is the only person I've ever known to have a platinum record—and certainly the only person I knew who kept it in the kitchen, behind his tool box. They didn't really move all the way to Nashville, but rather to a quaint little town associated with the University of the South: Sewannee, Tennessee. A few years later we would visit them there and David would be treated to a preferential recording session in Nashville while I went hiking by myself in the woods (the producer was superstitious about having women in the audience)—he needn't have worried about me.

A present day comment: Over fifty years have passed since I met "the man." Roger LaVoie, builder, songwriter, author, and all round creative genius, remains a best friend and a part of our lives, brother to both of us.

Once, in the age of innocence...

We'd lived in Cedar Key for about two years and I'd dropped my guard. People shouldn't have had to tell me to seal car doors and windows, bolt doors and not to talk to strangers. Our mission was to deliver Jimmy to the Atlanta airport for a college trip to Spain and Portugal. He'd forgotten to pack his deodorant. The entire family trooped into the K-Mart to assist him in his choice of

odor eater.

When we returned I quizzicled, "Where is my bag? You know, the one that has my book, my pink reading glasses, my billfold and the medicine? It's the bag that has my favorite picture of you when you still had red hair. It is the one that holds every major credit card known to the United States, including a Visa card with a Florida Gator on it." David suggested that someone had stolen it. How *dare* anyone steal something from *me*?

Jimmy got to the airport on time. But for the grace of God and the thief's ignorance he would have been without a passport and his traveling money, also easily accessed from the open side vent. Nonetheless, it left me without being able to identify myself or being able to read my own handwriting. To this day, I still don't know how my novel ended.

It wasn't much of a bag—part of a soft-sided Samsonite group. It was one of those pieces that becomes part of one's own persona. I hated to lose it. When I get really angry, I get sick—like nauseated. I was really angry and really sick. I did pray that the idiots who took my bag would have taken the $12.13 in cash and tossed the rest of the "junk" into the bushes. How did we ever search the bushes! I stood on my head in dumpsters looking and clambered down into ravines adjacent to that shopping mall. We had the Forest Park (Georgia) police out and they smiled benignly at me.

"You didn't lock the window of your vehicle?"

"No ma'am."

She didn't have much sympathy for this innocent.

There is something terribly tragic about instances like this. Why should I have to lock everything up? Why should I consider myself always a potential victim? Why must I mistrust?

I personally vow that if there becomes a trend in my community toward this way of living, I'll bring out the karate chop. I'm skinny, but I am not frail. Neither are my neighbors and most of them can aim better than me. I might hit something a thief would rather save.

I didn't lock the car today. This car doesn't lock. Most of the time, I leave the key in the ignition. No one except me can figure out how to put it into reverse anyway. For the sheer joy of it all, I am in Cedar Key!

Kids Almost-Not Quite-Civilized

March 1989

My children are reaching the age where they are nearly civilized. I say "nearly," since there are some noteworthy lapses that would make Attila the Hun look like Father Flanagan.

Still, I have myself to blame for not insisting on the use of bed linen, socks that match, and buttoning collars under ties.

I periodically remind them even today not to use spoons as shovels and that one shouldn't shake up a soft drink before opening it and wooshing it into the mouth while driving down the Interstate.

Scolding someone a full head taller than you for wiping his face on his T-shirt tail (while it is still attached to the body) is especially embarrassing when you're standing in a check-out line in K-Mart. More so when the miscreant then reaches for *your* shirt tail as a substitute.

When I think of all of the things that they did learn, I don't feel so bad: important things–like not spitting into water fountains or on sidewalks; things like not throwing underwear into the toilet and flushing it down; important things like stopping a car to remove a tortoise from the middle of a road; things like saying "Thank you;" fierce loyalty to family and friends; honor and discretion. Obedience was never a strong suit but they have their discretion act down pat.

It's not often that the whole crew is together anymore under the same roof. These occasions almost always call for an all night talk-a-thon. Father and I bow out—we are literally the fourth and fifth wheels on this cycle. It is in these few minutes of twilight sleep that a mother can learn so much about growing sons. She wishes that father wouldn't snore so she could hear better.

"Is that shouting laughter?"

"What was that crash!?" I leap from bed—then resist the impulse. "They can clean it up."

College student banter is thick; they talk about girls and clubs and gigs and bands and guitars and girls. They talk about more girls, then Aristotle and Donald Trump and trucks.

It gets noisy again when they move into politics and religion. (If we were to have a revolution, each of my children would have a different side and they've invented *schisms* that the world has not yet encountered.)

I was drifting off into maternally blissful pride when I heard someone say, "Ask Mom. She knows some chemistry."

"Omigod." It was thereafter a fitful sleep.

The next morning, hovering around a pitcher of pineapple juice and scrambled eggs, came a discussion of the different types of alcohol and their various uses. I waxed poetic about the ethyls, methyls and isopropyls. I cited stories of blindness and death from methyl alcohol poisoning and about the content of alcohol in over the counter medicines. They didn't seem to know that people with an intolerance can react violently even to shaving lotions.

"So what did you learn from all of this talk?" I said in my most professorial tone.

"Don't drink cough syrup when you are expecting to get a speeding ticket!"

"Shaving lotion is bad for the eyes." Steven, in his own inimitable style, had struck again. Aristotle couldn't have said it better!

As they were leaving the house that afternoon for points south, I overheard David say to Jim, "You'll read all about it in *The Beacon.*"

My Life Flashes Before My Eyes

March 1991

If you ever get the masochistic urge to know everything you've done wrong for the last twenty-one years, just allow your college student son to come home for spring break.

In the first five minutes you learn that you had neglected to tell him that 1) microwave ovens can burn fingers, 2) that bleach is not a substitute for laundry detergent, 3) that he has learned how to grow ferns indoors. (It isn't fern, it is algae in that sink.)

Upon opening the car door (or trying to) a parent is informed that "you really should get this fixed."

There is a certain awe or majesty about listening to college students explain their courses of study. "I have to do a paper about culture." Don't try to pin them down as to whether it is the horti-aqua or agar-agar type of culture. Argue for thirty-five minutes down State Road 24 about how to proceed with research. It was always my own theory (and it usually worked) that to ensure an A+ paper, one should find something that the instructor has never heard of, quote authoritatively from obscure diaries and journals,

and footnote everything—even your name and student number. (Instructors love footnotes.) Call it "original research" if you make it up.

By the time we reach Otter Creek, the subject is exhausted and so am I. Dad gets a word in edgewise: "Did you know that your mother is starting a flea farm?" That's what I consider downright inappropriate conversation in front of our son.

Upon entering the house, the first thing son says is: "Shadow has fleas." (Yes, dear, he is the flea farm.)

"Well, why don't you do something about it? His tag is out of date." (Why don't *you* take him to the vet?)

"When was the last time you changed his water?" (Thirty minutes before leaving this morning.)

"Does he get brushed daily?" (No.)

"Where is Petunia?" (I don't know)

"Mom, if you are going to have these cats, you must take care of them!" (Where had he heard that line?)

"I brought some laundry home." (I've heard *that* line quite a few times.)

"Why do you buy this detergent?" (Because it is cheap, that is why.)

"I use hypoallergenic Cheer." (You can afford it, considering how often your laundry gets done.)

"Mom, remember that brown sweater you bought me last summer? Look at it now!" (The 100% wool McGregor could have fit Barbie's Ken.

With the initial shock of being back home in the *real world* of parents who keep strange hours—up at 7:30 AM and in bed by 11 PM—the son settles into routine sneaker washing and chores.

"Why don't we have a gray water system here?"

"A *What*?"

"It's something they do in California to conserve water—each house has a gray water storage tank to wash cars and water lawns." Never mind that I haven't washed a car in three years and the only lawn that gets watered are my new azaleas. A gray water system sounds wonderful except for the fact it would cost nearly as much to put one in as the house cost to build. I was told we should have thought ahead. We should also have a windmill and solar panels.

Referring to our carport, "This area wouldn't be such a mess if you'd enclose it."

"Darling, dear one, tell that to those who couldn't make up their minds whether we were allowed to have lattice, breakaway walls or concrete. I couldn't agree with you more about the fact that it is a mess. The broom is over there."

"How should I dry these Reeboks?"

"On the deck—open the laces and pull out the tongues." (It sounded like an examining room speech.) I was once again on firm ground as mama know-it-all.

"Mom, there is something I've always wondered about. Why were you always late picking Jim and me up from kindergarten?" Dare I tell him that it could have been that I was extracting a pair of socks from the potty or retrieving a Cub Scout badge from the sink P-trap or de-fleaing a dog or writing a letter protesting something I considered a sacrilege or assault on our planet Earth? Could I tell him that I once knew all the answers and none of the questions?

He, like the rest of us, will learn all that soon enough. Meanwhile, the son in question just brought me a plate of biscuits fresh from the oven, smelling divine and toasty golden.

It's a nice feeling to be eating biscuits with a son. I didn't even have to remind him to butter the pan. Someplace along the line, I did something right!

Spring Break May Break Me Yet

March 1990

I must admit to learning quite a bit from Steve this trip. As a new member of the Santa Fe Zoo program, he's been assigned some landscaping details (like pulling weeds). He says that next to our tools, theirs are in good condition. I promise you I'd never let him near our axe—it is about as sharp as a Neanderthal club—but apparently they had to beat down a tree on campus with theirs, so I don't feel too bad. And yes, I do have to soak our clippers in rust remover each spring. What is new? He's learned that indeed one must shake roots loose before planting azaleas. I was forty before I learned that—and didn't believe it until I was forty-five.

He taught me how to carry an ocelot. We tried the technique on Shadow, who is very mild-mannered but weighs as much as a small Bengal tiger. Shadow let Steve demonstrate various bundlings

and eventually the dusting process. Shadow does a lot of glaring but doesn't get too physical with his well-manicured claws. Miss Petunia has all the social graces of a paranoid rattlesnake. We sneaked up on her. She made a flying leap to the top of the buffet. I'm saying, "That's Grandma's china in there!" Great White Hunter Steve got her down. His comment: "This is why we wear long-sleeved shirts and gloves." (Oh!) I went for the antiseptic.

My experience with college students on Spring Break (when they are home and not cavorting around some beach) is that it seems that they have just discovered the glories of sleep. Steve is no exception. We have two unoccupied bedrooms. His clothes go in one and he goes in the other. Both are filled up. They rediscover the joys of a washing machine that doesn't require enough quarters to pay the rent and Mom's car which generally has gasoline in it.

It's really a pleasure having him home. He and I were pioneers in Cedar Key a few years ago. We learned to put up with each other's idiosyncrasies and revel in them.

A Really "Moving" Experience

June 1990

Parents, in their wont to share with their grown children, often agree to the darndest things. Some of these things require professional, not parental help. At least, the parent needs professional help before the experience is complete.

On this particular sun-drenched Sunday, Dave and I agreed to help Steve move. This move was not to another city or another state or even across town. It was across the apartment complex.

Steve had carefully bagged and boxed many items and hauled them over to the new place on foot. When we arrived, the current apartment was still completely furnished. So was his closet. While the refrigerator is never well-stocked, the cupboards still were. I'm wondering whether these objects were cloning. I did the packaging and Dave and Steve did the hauling. I picked up enough loose change to pay his next month's rent. "Don't mind the dirty dishes, Mom—the dishwasher here doesn't work." Neither does the kitchen sink, I found out in a hurry.

We disassembled the bed first, then tried to take a desk apart so it would fit through the door. It must have grown in that room or was born there! And I, with my puttering (Dave's words), was rapidly running out of bags and boxes. I started filling the thirty-gallon (?) oil drums that he used for tables and his laundry hamper with odds and ends. How does a child accumulate such a conglomeration in such a short time? For that matter, how do any of us?

Load after load traveled the two blocks. I'd been *efficiently* stacking the boxes, etc. by the driveway. Then I started bringing them back in. It was raining!

There was no use trying to be neat after that. I'd run out of boxes, bags and pillowcases anyway. They started hauling boxes and bags back. It was no longer drizzling. It was a gully-washer. While I was drenched from perspiration, they arrived back drenched with acid rain.

Then Dave had a bright idea: "You two pack and load, and I'll drive."

You've probably never met a full-sized closet stacked floor-to-ceiling with LP records. Such esoterica ranges from Theodore Bikel past Elvis Presley to Led Zeppelin. On the other side of the room is a cabinet full of cassettes. We hadn't begun to disconnect the stereo system or VCR or TV or all the clocks in the house, the radios and telephone. It was going to be a long day. I suddenly discovered yet another box of records—all 45's.

The rain continued in earnest. At least the house plants were benefiting. On the final trip—and there really was one—Steve rode his bike (which is normally housed in the bedroom) through the rain to the new place. This final trip had the entire back of the Cherokee once again filled with records, the back seat with clothes, and sitting on the tailgate, one six-foot tomato plant, a blooming zinnia, a stalk of corn (with a young ear) and a very pretty English Ivy. The fifty pounds of ponytail palm went earlier. On my lap were the contents of the medicine chest (which we almost forgot) in a soggy brown paper bag that I fished out of the trash.

"Steven," his father said, "I hope you stay in this place for the rest of your life. This is more stuff than we moved from Orlando after living in that house twenty years!"

There was a hint of a wry little grin as we drove away. We knew at least that we didn't have it all to put away. I for one don't want

Steve to call and ask where I put his toothbrush—I have not the vaguest idea. At least he will be able to find his records.

Steven heads to sea on the Military Sealift Command's fast sealift ship USNS *Denebola,* which carried military equipment for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Son Steven loved the animal part of the zoo management program at Santa Fe Community College. He found the technical side of the curriculum a little too difficult and considered other career options. Fate sometimes finds a way to step in, although seemingly by chance. Good friend and Cedar Key resident Robert Crane retired from a career at sea, the life of a merchant marine captain. He suggested Steven consider training as a merchant seaman at the Harry Lundeberg School of Seamanship at Piney Point, Maryland. The school, sponsored by the Seafarers International Union of North America, offered free training and initial job placement. Thus began Steven's twenty-year career as a merchant seaman.

One Big Happy Family (Just Don't Walk on My Freshly Waxed Deck!)

October 1993

My son Steven's budding career as a seaman has given him an entirely different perspective on housework. The major difference between his work and mine is that his floors keep moving. As a steward's assistant to fourteen crew members and twenty-nine officers and scientists, he is part maid, part waiter, part bottle washer and swabbie. It's not (as mothers would say) a glamorous job. I was interested, as the mother of a child who is allergic to sweat and dirt, how he would survive walking the plank. My children, like their mother, get no *Good Housekeeping* medals, but they are survivalists!

"Tell me about your job on the ship."

"It's no joke that even after you get your sea legs, that ship still lurches around. Once I was carrying two platters of spaghetti up to the officers. The ship went this way. I went that way and the spaghetti went up into the overhead pipes. When the captain came down looking for dinner, he didn't seem upset that I had pasta in my ears. He wanted to know if there would be enough food for dinner! The cook said there would be, but the cook lied. Do you know how hard it is to get tomato sauce off hot water pipes when it glues itself there?"

"Was it as bad as when I broke the gallon of salad oil?"

"It was even worse than when I tried to carry a crate of eggs from the pantry to the kitchen and the crate fell apart!"

"Omelet!"

"I got blamed for a lot of stuff I didn't do, like break the sterilizer. Somebody put a pizza pan in it and took it apart to make it fit! And, the dumbwaiter to the officers quarters never worked. That's why we were always hauling things up to them. Officers never got more than a half cup of coffee—and it didn't matter how we started out."

"How was the dishwasher?"

"Well, I was the dishwasher because ours never got installed. The guys were always complaining, but I figured it gave them something to do. Nobody ever got sick from my dirty dishes!" (This sounds fair enough from a son who rejects forks with water spots coming from his mother's sink.)

I thought I'd be cute and ask him about some of the things that used to really drive me up the wall.

"What are your pet peeves?"

"People who put their feet on the coffee table! Guys who sit on furniture wearing greasy, dirty clothes. They do that all the time!" (Steve, please take your feet off the coffee table!)

"What do you do about clothes and personal items that never get picked up?" (Having lived with four men most of my adult life, I have known items to actually grow to end tables and give birth behind seat cushions.)

"That's easy. We use them to trade with the locals in port. How many Ron-Jon Surf Shop T-shirts do you think are being worn on the Ivory Coast of Africa?"

That system would never have worked for me. When in desperation, after holding clothing and toys for ransom, I'd call Goodwill. They'd take one look and say: "You want *us* to take *that*? What will you pay us?"

Once, however, Steve's system backfired. Steve had collected a large box of tradeables and carried it dockside to barter for some expensive swords. The overzealous locals mobbed Steve. He survived with his skin intact, no swords or goody box.

I looked around the house to get some more ideas for things that drive mothers crazy. In my house it is never hard to become inspired.

"What about wet towels left to mold in the corners of rooms or on beds?"

That too was easy: "When we get to port, we send them to a local laundry. They never come back." Admittedly, I never tried this solution. At sea, Steve picks up towels but does not do laundry. The service is missing a bet here considering his earned title of "Bleach King." Maybe on his next cruise.

My guilt quotient was rapidly becoming satisfied. Every mother of grown children needs a guilt-fix now and again. We recalled the days when I dutifully (and regularly) scrubbed down thirty-eight feet of kitchen floor and posted a guard at each door—daring anyone to come in. (And this was at 3 AM!)

"We wax the decks—but there is no good time to do it! We get overtime because it has to be in the middle of the night. Still, you get footprints!" (Overtime? I never got overtime!)

"One guy threatened to use my baseball bat on the first person to walk on our wet floor." (Baseball bat? I never thought of that, either!)

One thing is certain. The next time I climb aboard a ship and see the gleaming brass and the shiny decks, have a half-cup of coffee, and see no tomato sauce on the overhead pipes, I'm going to look around and salute the first steward I see!

A Very Special Mother's Day

May 1990

Over the past few years, I have poked a lot of fun at my family (and myself) in this column. ("Mom, did you have to say *that*?") I would counter, "It was true, wasn't it?" In my own perverse way, I was telling each of them that I was thinking of him. You see, I'm not a Valentine-type person.

This column then is dedicated to all those children of non-mushy mothers. It is they who gave us that very special title and it is they who made us the way we are—not the reverse, as is a commonly held belief.

To David III on whom I experimented and tried out what I'd learned in the pediatric textbooks. To David of the two-year-old tantrum that was outgrown about age sixteen. To David of the Rock-Band-In-The-Attic years; the long hair, the mustache, the souped-up cars and the motorcycle. To David, who felt he needed karate to get through the third grade. To David who was born the day before Mother's Day before I had more than one maternity dress completed. To David with a will of iron, a tongue of sharp steel and a heart of pure gold. To David who could write an algebra book (from memory). To David, the philosopher-tycoon and super-salesman; David the reformer (starting with his parents). To David, my first-born, of whom his grandmother said when she saw him only hours old: "Honey, do you realize that face will someday have whiskers?" ("Yes, Mama, I do—now!")

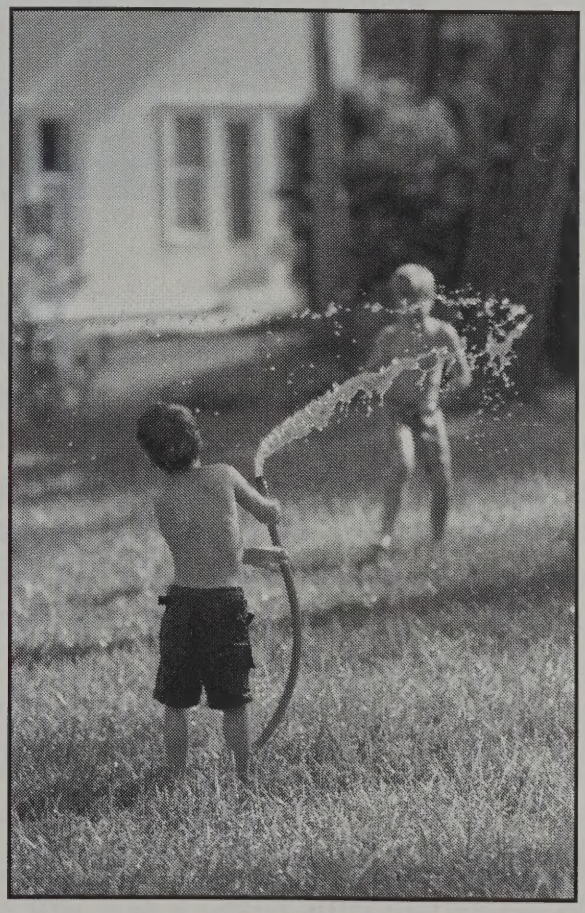
This one's for Jimmy (nee James Michael). This is the child that kept me in those maternity clothes for an extra six weeks. He hasn't been on time for anything since. This is the child that my regular

fourteen-year-old (male) sitter, upon taking his first look, said, "I'm sorry." At birth Jim would have won no beauty contests. Tell that to the girls now. To Jim, the singer, the athlete, the clown. To Jim, who was always breaking something: windows, legs, toes, dishes. To Jim, who was always winning something: door prizes, raffles, awards, hearts of teachers and coaches and fair maidens. To Jim, the student, who has attended Emory University for four years on scholarship and maintained a president's honor-roll status. To Jim who rolled with the punch when he discovered he was diabetic two years ago; he continued his academic, athletic and social activities, worked heavy construction last summer, and has held a part-time job shucking oysters in Atlanta this year. To Jim who went to Spain with a class and found himself on stage with a Spanish movie star. To Jim who called home from Costa Rica (collect) while on a surfing trip. To Jim who spent his book money at Mardi Gras. To Jim, who will graduate from Emory the day after Mother's Day, 1990.

Being Number Three, you'd better plan on being your own man from the beginning. I'd thrown the book away when Jim was born and Steven was the one to rewrite it. When Steve was learning to walk, one or the other brother would push him down. He had to shout to be heard. It wasn't easy being Number Three in our house. This is the child with hearing problems and resultant speech problems. This is the child with the determination of the tortoise in the fable. This is the child who wrote stories before he could write his name. This is the child who enchanted neighbors and maids and frustrated loving teachers. He redecorated his room so many times, I was hard pressed to find the closet for the clothes. He created so many interesting things in the kitchen because he was yet unable to read labels. This was the frightened young man who completed a rugged Outward Bound course in North Carolina and came home more confident than seemed possible. Then to Steven, I say Happy Mother's Day: to Steven, who has made his mother so proud with his unflagging spirit in school work. To the young man who never says "I can't"—just "It's going to take me longer." To Steve who manages his own apartment and his own finances with frugality of a Scottish laird. To Steve who is not afraid to ask for help and will badger one until he gets it. To Steve who invented coconut and peanut butter pizza. To Steven who brought his mom to Cedar Key.

It's these young men and their father, I want to say Happy Mother's Day. For, without them, it would not be possible.

Send me no flowers. Just sing me a song. When I write about you, it is love that is recorded on the floppy disk and no disk is big enough to hold it all.



Mama

We should be careful when stepping into the study of genealogy lest we trip over our ancestors' baggage. I grew with the understanding that several generations back my forebears collected the genetic material of the American Indian. How or who or what or why or where or when is unimportant. What is important is that it is a good circumstance to give blame (or credit) for those characteristics we cannot explain away by other fates. My father's family was definitely in the right place in the right time to give credence to such a circumstance.

My dad's mother, Lydia Gaskins Engle, was born and grew up in the Ohio River Valley in Kentucky. She grew up with and learned from the native Americans of that region. Before her generation the family descended from a long line of Marylanders who emigrated west as the country outgrew her original colonies. My dad's father could boast a similar line though he was not as impressed with the native habits as my grandmother Lydia would grow to be.

When my mother (a city girl) Lorraine Friedmann married my father she was taken under Lydia's wing and tutored in the ways of plants and animals as Lydia had learned from her mother and her native neighbors. It wasn't long before the Engle family moved to

Florida where they would begin their learning experiences from scratch: new plants, new animals; a different climate and weather patterns. What salves would work on which rashes? What plants might deter which unwelcome animals? My mother was a willing student and 1929 Tampa was their classroom. They respected these new and sometimes feared creatures: reptiles, birds, insects, cats, wild hogs and dogs. They did not believe in the adage "kill or be killed." Their way was more like "Give the critters their space." It would always be so and became my own mantra as well.

There were a few notable exceptions: for example, my mom could not abide the big yellow grasshoppers that ate her beloved lily plants. She was as cold as any executioner in dispatching those grasshoppers! She was far ahead of her time in refusing to use poisons for fear of contaminating the soil or water supply.

Several days after our move to Cedar Key, Daddy died while visiting my brother Jack and his family in Utah. My newspaper column years coincided with Mama's attempt to adjust to life without Daddy and my struggle—mental and physical—to deal with Mama's last years.

I am pleased to introduce my mom, Lorraine Helen Mary Martha Friedmann Engle (1910-1993).

A National Sport-Complaining About Our Children

January 1991

Mine are not perfect, but they sure are nice people. David III called the other night looking for Dad. He was worried because he hadn't found him in Orlando and we had disappeared from Cedar Key. (We were in Tallahassee for Lawton Chile's Inauguration as Governor.) Jim's friend wrote us a two-page letter thanking us for a Christmas that was a pretty informal affair. Steve checked in with his peanut-butter pizza recipe for the Garden Club's cookbook. Jim wanted us to know that he is now employed full-time with the IRS. Parents like this sort of thing.

I start looking at it from another perspective. I am a child too. I'm a selfish person and have been spoiled rotten from the day I

was born by a loving mother and father and brothers who taught me to kick shins before I could walk. I married a man who, despite protests to the contrary, dotes on my whims. We lost Daddy a few years ago—a real tough thing to happen. Roles were reversed as my siblings and I try to care for Mama in absentia.

Mama was not born in 1776, but she is the spirit of independence—but she is having a hard time living alone. Within the past several months we explored the possibilities of retirement centers. That we knew it was necessary was not enough. It wasn't pleasant. It wasn't joyful. It wasn't fun. Neither was it horrible, awful or disastrous. It meant spending several weekends checking out facilities, preparing some firm speeches and oratory. It meant galvanizing the family to present the case. It meant cleaning her house. It meant strong arms dissembling furniture and strong tummies doing cupboards and pantries and attic. It meant convincing Mama that life could and would be worth living again—with new friends, good food and comfortable surroundings, convenient church and dependable transportation.

The child says, "I love you." The adult is wracked with guilt. The bald baby hugs the neck but the gray haired grownup weeps for the mama who used to be in her glory hanging clothes on an outdoor clothesline or eating cold fish for breakfast on the back stoop. Hug that person nearest to you, dearest to you. Tomorrow will come faster than yesterday has gone.

Dear House, You Are Really Very Small, Just Big Enough for Love, That's All—You Want a What'?????

April 1993

Had I been out in the sun too long or was I taking my final guilt trip? I repeated: "I want to buy an ironing board!" At that moment, computers all over America crashed and traffic lights ceased to function. Birds stopped migration proceedings mid-flight. Graves opened and angels sang. Dave found his voice: "That's what I *thought* you said!" I continued chirping: "..and a half-dozen cans of spray starch." (I'd run into the iron just last month when I was looking

for the oyster-shucking gloves.) "Just don't get any ideas about going out and buying 100%-cotton Madras shirts again."

My mother left me a rich and colorful heritage: a sense of the absurd; a love of things growing and furry or feathered; and what amounts to fifteen or so trunks of crocheted doilies, tablecloths and embroidered antimacassars.

"You don't need an ironing board, Susan, you need an altar society!" To think that I myself contributed to this third generation (at least) of needlework lunacy made me feel better. I knew that someday I'd get my revenge on some unsuspecting female progeny all in the name of "Grandma made it when she was only six!" In my mother's and grandmother's case, they continued to "do it" until they were eighty-something. That's a heck of a lot of string and knots—umbilical cords to memories.

My favorite pieces are no longer of museum quality. They'd lived on many dressers and chair arms over the years. They'd felt Vaseline Hair Tonic and Brill-Creme. They'd been dappled with nail polishes. Their "lazy-daisies" and "French knots" were pulled and faded. There are tablecloths that took years to crochet—evidenced now by the aging of the many knots of "white" crochet thread. Evidenced too was the progression of arthritis in the talented fingers—early work was very tightly woven stitches; later, less perfect, looser handiwork. Mama called crocheting her "therapy" (mental as well as physical).

As with most things Mama did, she did "differently." Now that she is gone, I am probably the only person who holds a crochet hook the way she did—with my index finger straight up like a spindle. She learned to crochet with the equivalent of #50 sewing thread when she was about five years old. No concessions were made for little fingers. In those days (about 1915 to 1920) she visited her Polish grandmother (who still had about half a dozen children at home) and learned embroidery and midwifery. From an Italian family (the Brunos down the street) she learned crocheting and probably more midwifery. An only child, she seemed to crave the boisterousness of these homes—the smells that permeated every room from rich cooking, cabbages and sausages, heavy sauces always on the stove. It was only natural that when it came time for the daughters of the family to learn to crochet or embroider or cook, she was "part of

the gang."

My own learning didn't take as well—but not for my mother's lack of trying. People (at least my mother) never really worried about kids playing with a sewing needle—getting stuck or "putting an eye out"—when I was growing up. She was not a perfectionist with my "work" but I was! It was no laughing matter that my doilies always wound up ruffled whether they were supposed to be or not. I didn't have the patience to rip out a day's work because I'd double crocheted where I should have singled. I didn't have the patience (or discipline) to take the time to set a stitch gauge before starting. Thus, I once made a sweater that was wider than it was long (and that was when I was about twenty years old!). My work bore no resemblance to patience, discipline or art. It taught me love. It taught me appreciation—appreciation that I'm finally old enough to recognize.

I brought the many boxes of linens home to Cedar Key. There was the fringed tablecloth that I begged to use every time I set the table. It was threadbare. How could that happen? Another tablecloth with a design that looked exactly like "C's" on the edge (I guess I must have been learning an alphabet at the time) was faded too. Only I could see the "C's." There were my favorite dresser scarves—each with a different color Revlon nail polish. There was delicate lace that I can't trust to even Woolite.

It's a weird fate to remember wash days with pathos. We'd cook up a batch of blue starch. (I ate the stuff.) The wash and rinse tubs were lined up: one with plain water, one with Clorox bleach and one with starch. Then there was the pot of full-strength thick starch reserved for doilies! (That was *my* job!) I dipped each doily, wrung it out and got my kicks watching it stiffen as it dried in the sun. It was utterly amazing to me that to this day, some of those pieces are still stiff as boards when sun dried. (*I'm not sure you can even buy dry starch anymore.*) I did a lot of doily ironing, too. In the days before steam irons, we dampened things with fingers from a dish of water set beside the iron that had two settings: "Cold" and "Hot." I became known as the "Scorch Princess" early on. I also developed an intense hatred not for ironing, but for ironing boards.

The basic design of the ironing board hasn't changed since I had the first one fall on my foot forty odd years ago. We haven't declared truce in all those years.

When I was really small, Daddy had spoiled us by building one into the kitchen wall. (At least it was his idea, that it would be folded up inside the cabinet when not in use.) I took it on faith that this was his intention since never once did I see that ironing board go into the wall, Murphy-bed style. Then my grandmother brought her contraption into our home. This monster had legs and springs and hooks that reached out and pinched and poked and stabbed. Ironing height was about shoulder level and no matter how I tried to adjust the board, it only got taller.

Over the years, I've sworn off ironing except in case of dire emergency. My roommate Carol Ann Shea and I went through college wearing wool sweaters over our blouses so we had only collars to iron! Our sorority house shower served as a steam sauna. I might be the only person to mourn the passing of polyester for this reason!

This year David helped me select an ironing board. It went up in the living room. I scraped the mung from the sole plate of the iron and revved it up. I filled the sinks with various combinations of stain removers and gentle washes. Soon I decided I would have to fill the bathtubs too. The linens soaked. I dare not even swish some of them. I found myself entranced, like reading someone's diary. I wondered just how many pansy doilies Mama had made over the years. It was one of her favorite patterns. How many tablecloths had she crocheted? I had four and had already given one to a friend. I laughed as I remembered my painstaking work on the cross-stitch that emerged from the kitchen sink.

My deck was strung with clothesline. (I didn't remember to buy clothespins!) Old stains were disappearing with the old-fashioned sun bleaching. I brought the first load in to be ironed.

Someplace in the recesses of my mind a radio played: It was *Stella Dallas* and *Our Gal Sunday* and *Hannibal Cobb* and *Perry Mason* and *The Romance Of Helen Trent.* The next morning I started out with a vengeance: *Don McNeill's Breakfast Club* followed by *Arthur Godfrey*—and more doilies. This day I looked under the cussed ironing board to make sure that some little kid with her scissors wasn't going to cut through the iron's cord any minute. That would be Little Susie a lifetime ago.

A Mother's Day Story

April 1992

One thing daughters like to do best is talk about their mothers. I don't think sons do this as much, but being a bona-fide daughter I can tell you I have many soul-sisters out there.

Since I have no daughters, I have only an idea of what I am missing. One of these days I may have a daughter-in-law or three that will probably make up for the current lack of genuine love that comes in the package of "Mother! Please don't do *that* in public!"

My mother was always doing something "horrifying" like talking to the postman or asking the butcher to re-grind a pound of hamburger! She once even (I swear this is true) arranged a date for me with a grocery store bag boy. Someplace between the carrots and the candy-corn she arranged a wedding! I told her in my best teenage sass that "if you like him so much, you go to the movies with him!" (I deserved that slap!)

You see, my mother *never* did anything right! For example, she bought generic bleach. Why couldn't we have real Clorox for a change? And for Godsakes—she sewed buttons on the hems of my blouses to keep them from coming out of the skirt waistband! I wasn't allowed to be normal with shirttails flying!

My mother was strange in other ways during my growing up days. She was the only person I knew who didn't drive a car. No matter that we only had one car—my mother didn't know how to drive! She was usually home when we came in from school and never to my knowledge played a game of bridge. She usually cut her own hair and gave herself Toni home permanents. (She gave me several too, with some pretty exotic results.) I prayed that my hair would fall out, that's how exotic I looked! My mother invented the Afro look, many years ahead of the fad.

Mama was never really into cooking. The reason for this is that my father wouldn't eat things that were mixed together. Did you ever go to a restaurant with a man who separated the lettuce from the tomatoes in a tossed salad? A person who *knew* that spinach was poisonous? If Mama breaded a pork chop, she was "hiding" it. I'm sure most of her culinary creativity was stifled before I was born. When it came to baking, Daddy said, "Leave it to the professionals." He trusted Betty Crocker and Duncan Hines so we did have cakes.

If Mrs. Gorton didn't do the fish sticks, we didn't eat fish. Mrs. Smith did the pies and Sara Lee the rest.

Mother never threw anything away. I became aware of this on a visit home from college in 1960. There, displayed proudly was... *Egad! A tooth*! It was the one I gave to the tooth fairy in 1948! Shattered illusions!

My mom is probably reading this and I want her to know that wrapped up in this Mother's Day package are fondest memories. Some days I ache for someone to sew buttons on my shirt tails. I'd like to come home to some Lipton's Noodle Soup. I'd enjoy just another episode of *Hannibal Cobb* on the radio with you. Just keep the home permanents away from my hair!

My Mother and Her "Pot" Plants

March 1990

It looks like I may wind up being the new President of the Cedar Key Garden Club. That is, unless Marina Blomberg (*Gainesville Sun* horticulture columnist) moves to Cedar Key. At least I have been nominated, an honor I am not sure I deserve. My record with plants is not too edifying. We still don't have any grass in the yard and we are batting about .500 with trees. The Christmas freeze of 1989 took a lot of ornamentals and last weekend the Christmas cactus blew off the deck and splattered all over the driveway. I now have 496 new Christmas cacti. My indoor poinsettias have withered and Miss Petunia thinks the deck planter boxes are her private porta-potties.

I really am a lousy gardener. I grow wonderful mint and parsley and strawberries, but I'm the only person you ever heard of that chemically pruned strawberries. This is what happens when you fertilize them and don't get the crystals washed off plants. The ones that remain are joyous to have more room to spread out, but still I feel like an assassin. I ate my first berry today so I don't feel too bad.

After the freeze, when I was assessing the damage, it occurred to me that I'd forgotten about my sweet potatoes. I started digging and found about forty yams underground. Something of a treasure hunt! Truth be known, David is the real gardener in the family.

What he plants, sprouts! He has lettuce that survived December and is so very pretty. It is also good to eat. Soon we will have another crop of snow peas and God only knows what else he planted.

But, this is not my story.

My mom was for several terms President of the North Tampa Garden Club, but this story precedes that by many years. In fact, it precedes me (and that goes back to the "Dark Ages"). Mama had moved to Tampa in 1929 and like all typical Yankees (sorry about that, Yankees) she didn't know a Spanish Needle from a Spanish Bayonet from a Spanish Fly. I doubt that she really cared a whole lot back then with a young child to pamper and a house to keep. In the ensuing years she started gathering "wildflowers" to put on the dining room table. She transplanted some of these to her yard. They thrived. Pretty foliage, lovely white blooms. Her neighbor had a field of these plants. Once a year the neighbor's son would come down to Florida from New York City and help his mother clear the field. He'd harvest and take away the plants. One day Mama was visited by an official-looking person. He told her she was growing marijuana—which was illegal even then. Sitting in front of him was a vase full of the flowers! Apparently Mrs. Alvino's nice son was harvesting the crop for sale in New York! Thus began my mother's illustrious garden clubbing career! (And her notoriety for "potted plants.")

It wasn't until many years later, when we kids were able to fix our own peanut butter sandwiches, that Mama took her garden clubbing seriously. She was into the poisonous plants, wild edibles and medicinals. Finally, after almost thirty years, she had a permit to grow marijuana for exhibition purposes. This got a little funny since she would exhibit at the Florida State Fair in Tampa and caused more than one raised eyebrow. Then she went on the air on educational television station WEDU with her "pot plants."

I'm hoping that I can talk her into coming up to Cedar Key in the near future to share some of her expertise with us who probably would kill even a marijuana plant. Mama is one of these people who can put a fence post in the ground and it will sprout leaves.

This isn't much of a recommendation from the nominee for presidency of the Garden Club but it might make some of you who are interested in joining less fearful. I need all the help I can get. Mama! Where *are* you?!

Tripping with My Mom Is a Real Trip

May 1990

If you've ever read *Charley's Aunt* or *Travels With Charley* or seen the play *Mame,* you'll have some idea of what it is like to take a trip with my mother. She is unique. Thank God.

Mama is aging. All of us kids agree that Mama is not getting older, she is just getting "more so."

Mama has never met a stranger. It makes no difference whether she is in Rome, Italy or Rome, Georgia. Whomever is the captive audience will learn about her children, their marriages, her grandchildren and now great-grandchildren. They will be treated to the flood of the Miami River in 1913 in Hamilton, Ohio and how she helped her father rebury floating corpses from the cemetery. They'll relive the removal of the Indians from the Mohawk Valley and the start of the Pennsylvania Railroad. They'll stow away in a boxcar and go to Cincinnati at the ripe old age of five. They'll know every engineer on every train, all of their children, all of their names.

My mother could talk for hours and never repeat herself. She has a memory like a tape deck. Push a button and you will get a story. [*I've taken my birthright seriously. Nowadays I write "Grandma's Mostly True Stories." Husband David calls them "Grandma's Seldom True Stories. I am the "Grandma" of which he speaks."*]

Lately, Mama has had some problems ambulating and uses a cane. She doesn't particularly like shopping and when, during a trip with us to Georgia, Dave suggested a shopping excursion to buy clothes (Dave is the shopper in the family) Mama chose to stay in the parking lot of the store. I was a little concerned for the residents of Thomaston, Georgia because I knew full well that Mama would find a pair of unsuspecting ears before I had the first dress off the rack.

Dave went out to check on her since I was dishabille. The victim was from Melbourne, Florida, a graduate of Georgia Tech. That was his mistake. One of my brothers went to Tech. The man was lost. He heard the stories of how Jack exploded the garage at age eight and is now a rocket specialist. According to my mother Jack put all of the shuttles up in space single-handedly. He took over where Werner von Braun left off. (Gosh, maybe he did!)

The purpose of this trip was to see our middle son graduate

from college. He had called the night before we left saying he had forgotten to order a cap and gown and might not be in the ceremony. I couldn't be too angry or upset since I was late to my own graduation at the University of Florida and had to sit with the wrong college. (*Believe it or not, I graduated with the College of Journalism and Advertising.*) Sounding just like my mom I said quietly: "St. Anthony, find Jim a cap and gown!"

The ceremony was in the Quadrangle of Emory University campus. People are nice and one nice person gave Mama a seat. Within the speed of light Mama had struck up a conversation with the lady to her left. Elizabeth Dole was the official speaker, but the lady next to Mama would have never known it.

On Mother's Day, Jim had arranged dinner at a Japanese steak house: Super fare, a wise choice, and Mama had never been to one. Before the onions were fried I thought she was going to bring the chef home with us. I was treated like one of the young'uns—which didn't do my ego any harm. Dave and I had coached Mama not to mention the words "marriage" or "engagement" to the young men present with their girlfriends or to the girls with their young men.

Jimmy had planned a party for after graduation at his house. Other relatives would be there. It was easy to spot Jim's room: it was the one with the view, a nice place. It also had the clothes stacked on the floor. Jim doesn't believe in closets or hangers. Some things never change.

When I returned to the main room, Mama was expounding a philosophical treatise about drinking beer. I found Dave and explained that we really needed to head south.

We stopped for another shopping spree. Dave was solicitous and found Mama holding court with a group of black ladies. I was a little concerned that Georgia might find it necessary to secede again.

If Bartram can have a trail named for him and Hernando DeSoto can evince historical research, I would like to nominate for perpetuity the Lorraine Engle Trail. It shouldn't be fancy because Mama isn't a fancy person. It should be lined with wildflowers and sunshine. With audio cassettes every mile or so.

Words

January 1992

The word felt right, but I wasn't comfortable with it until I dragged the book off the shelf and looked it up. Yep, that was it all right! "Basic truth" was what I was looking for. No one had ever accused me of telling the basic truth before. I can't embroider a pillow case, but I am a master at crocheting an edge on a handkerchief-sized story.

Dave, Steve and I were in the elegant living room of a newly-met friend in Oviedo, Florida. My mom was with us as well. We were there for the serious purpose of trying to determine whether Mama would be comfortable living there with the other ladies and whether they would be comfortable providing help for her. Mama was probably the only person there that was comfortable—even with her aching ribs and upset stomach. My long-time friend Toni, the nurse in charge of the facility, hugged and teased Mama into her talk-mode. Talk about aphorisms.

"I trust Susie. You want to know why? She's competent." (About this time I'm beginning to wonder whether we shouldn't have taken Mama to a different type of facility.)

Then, true to form, she pointed her finger at David: "She's competent because of *him*!"

When the laughter in the room settled to a dull roar, I countered: "Mama, are you saying I wasn't competent before I married Dave ?"

At that moment she did her Jack Benny roll-your-eyes-skyward routine. Dave jumped into the fray by saying something about his teaching me everything I know, from cooking on. The scene didn't get prettier when I suggested that I am like I am because of him. (He wasn't ready for that thrust.) Aphorism—that is the right word!

My mom presided over the planting of the Christmas Tree in Cedar Key City Park only a few weeks ago. She traveled here in Annette Haven's (dear friend and founder of the Cedar Key Garden Club) Good Humor van with the tree and me in the back. She planned on helping us pick up trash from Highway 24 the next day, but reason prevailed. Afterward she wanted to know if we had fun. You see, my mom genuinely enjoys things like that. My mom loves kitties and puppies and butterflies, wiping babies noses and bot-

toms, and bandaging scraped shins.

Aphorism-basic truth: "Do Unto Others As You Would Have Them Do Unto You—Bread Cast Upon The Waters...." (gets soggy). If you are nice, you will be niced back at. I mean that, just the way I said it.

Note: why is it that whenever I find a perfectly good word to use—even go to the trouble to look it up in the dictionary—it winds up in the *Dear Abby* column the very next morning? It really isn't fair, you know!

Christmas Tree Planting in Cedar Key Park

Bye Mama, See You Later— Save a Cloud for Us

February 1993

My mom was one of the truly gentle people of the world. Not that she didn't have a sharp tongue sometimes or a healthy backhand for sassy children. Mama had a story for every occasion with slight variations on the theme, depending on whose ear she was bending. You might say that I get my gift of gab naturally.

She was a not-too-frequent visitor to Cedar Key, but many of you will remember her as the little old lady in tennis shoes who joined the Cedar Key Garden Club at the Christmas tree planting festivities a year or so ago. She came to Annette's and my rescue when our scheduled speaker canceled. She rode in Annette's "Good Humor Truck" up front with her feet planted firmly on the dash all the way from Dade City. (I sat with the Christmas tree!) She told some of her stories. Another time, she was participating in a seniors' bus tour of the island when she got tired and rested in Pelican Realty. Realtor Dottie Grix recalls her afternoon of story-telling. She herself recalled the days when she and Daddy would stay at the Island Hotel sipping Tom Collinses on the balcony and waving to the people below. They were like that!

The last few years weren't happy ones for Mama. She missed Daddy. There just wasn't any way to fill that void. Hands could no longer play the piano or crochet. Eyes were fogged. Legs wouldn't support her frail body. She hurt (as she would jokingly tell me) in places that she didn't even know she had.

Mama's body died last week. She'll never leave those of us whose lives she touched.

Mama loved animals (after all, she had four of her own human variety). She was an extraordinary teacher and once even turned our un-ironed clothes hamper into a science lesson: a family of ringneck snakes had taken up residence under the ironing board! That same linen hamper held history: "Mama, I haven't seen this blouse since last fall!" My brother (who was in medical school at the time) chided her housekeeping: "Mama, do you know why we are all so disgustingly healthy? We are immune to dirt!" Mama was always busy putting Mercurochrome on my knees or pouring turpentine into a puncture or bandaging the tail of some cat.

We knew that we could bring the blue-jay with the broken wing into the kitchen where Mama would administer her brand of veterinary medicine. If the bird didn't drown in the toilet by morning, it would surely fly free in a few weeks. Our home was residence to an orphan flying squirrel, a tortoise named Tamiami, canaries, parakeets, and many black cats—Katania I, II, III and IV, and Midnite. There were the Smokies and the Twinkles and the Speckles. We had only one dog at a time: Butchie (my brother Jack called her "Bitchie") who nursed kittens when her own puppy days were over,

Casey (the "Wonder Dog") who "said" grace at the table each night and appeared on ABC—Captain Mac's early television show—and Snoopy, Lassie's look-a-like. It was a mellow household, but of the team Mary and Martha, Mama was definitely the Mary, when it came to housekeeping.

Mama was unorthodox. My brothers had afternoon poker games in our back yard under her aegis. More churchly neighbors railed at this activity as being heathen. Mama responded, "I know where *my* boys are. Do you?" (Yes, they were in our back yard playing poker! *Sounds pretty familiar!*)

Perhaps one of my most vivid memories—which seemed an ongoing thing for at least eight years—was going to church downtown after paying the water bill and electric and mortgage. Mama always hand delivered these payments. We prayed so many novenas that it is no wonder I needed Mercurochrome on my knees. Somehow, we'd find the money for yet another quarter of tuition at Emory—where my brother Tommy matriculated (and studied too).

Mama "manning" the counter at our Dixie Hobby Shop—circa 1948

Mama ran a small hobby shop, a real hangout for teenagers who were always too broke to buy anything. They all called her "Mom." One particular Gasparilla Parade day, Jack and I were each given fifty cents to spend. We could ride the bus to town or we could walk (about fifty blocks) and save the dimes for popcorn. We opted to walk and meet Mama later. She didn't show up that day.

We weren't worried. I guess we didn't think much about it at all until later. A gentlemen had shown up at the shop and bought exactly $375 worth of merchandise for the orphanage (Tampa's Mary Help of Christians' School)—the exact amount of Tommy's overdue quarterly tuition. These things happened that way to my mom.

Our house had so many mortgages (all eventually paid off) that we could have wallpapered a warehouse. Mama's credit was impeccable. I remember once when John David Gilbert (he was nine and I was six) and I sold day-old newspapers that we'd found behind our Margaret Ann supermarket for half price. When Mama found out she ordered us to return all those nickels. We had, of course, stolen the papers, but we didn't know it until she told us.

There was the day that I actually did steal something—on purpose. I just wanted to see if I could get away with it. I didn't. Johnny Jones ran a small market across the street from the Dixie Hobby Shop. Each day it was my job (this was a pre-schooler doing this) to go over and either get a couple of cans of soup or sardines or crackers from him or cross busy Florida Avenue to get a Chicken Basket from Seely's Drive-In. This day I'd planned my "crime." I took a package of Black Jack Gum (the black licorice kind). I put the whole package in my mouth before I crossed the street (to remove the evidence?). Mama and I were eating lunch (I don't know what I did with the wad) when Johnny Jones came in. "Mrs. Engle, I think Susie forgot to pay for her gum." Mama's eyes flashed. She gave Johnny a nickel—and she gave me "hell." I sat on a stool in the back room for the rest of the day while Mama figured out what to do with this pint-sized criminal. The next morning I was marched over to Johnny's market. I'd be working for him that day. I dusted Campbell soup cans all morning, wetting the dust rag with my tears. No mention was made of this sin ever again. Mama caught some kids stealing from her. The next thing I knew they were mopping the floor. That was the way Mama did things.

Mama was, in her own way, a very proper lady. Her elegance didn't include wearing designer clothes or some of the other trappings of society. Her elegance was that of the soul. It was a feeling you got when you were around her. A hobby shop friend of Mama's and Daddy's, A. C. Rios, raised canaries. I was the resident brat and loved by Mr. Rios. He wanted to give me a canary. Oh, how I wanted that canary!

One day he came in to the shop and I threw my arms around his 300-plus pounds of girth and said: "A. C., when am I going to get my canary?" I spent that afternoon sitting on the stool in the back room getting lectures (between customers) on tact, diplomacy and good taste. A. C. Rios did indeed give me my canary (we named it "A. C.") but the man was always "Mr. Rios" to me from that day on. Tongue lashings from my mother were unforgettable.

Mama was a lady who defended her children like a mama lion would her wayward cub. Those hobby shop years were tough ones, I suppose. I was born with a streak of independence a mile wide and a yard long. We'd always walked to the shop (about two miles or so) in and out and over turtle ponds and vacant lots, through school yards and cemeteries. By the time I went to first grade I was probably an authority on the geography of Seminole Heights in Tampa.

After a rain, our biggest concern was squashing the little black frogs on Highland Avenue (now a major thoroughfare). So, one pretty spring day, I was playing with a new friend on South Street alongside the hobby shop and wanted to show her my dog Butch. Butch was at home. Yes, I knew the way. We took off from her backyard and went to Clearfield Avenue. I knew how to get into the house—you simply rattled the front door knob until the lock disengaged. Butch wasn't sure what was happening when I rifled Mama's dresser drawer for nylons to use as a leash. (Butch had never worn a leash or a collar, but I improvised.) I fixed my new friend Diane a cup of tea. It didn't occur to me that this was *outre* behavior. We walked back to the shop. Tampa's Finest were out in front of the shop with lights flashing. Diane's mother was hysterical. Mama wasn't all that happy either, except to see us safe. She looked that lady in the eye and said, "Susie knew where she was going. Now please, shut up." I spent the rest of the day on the stool in the back room. Butch never stayed home again. She knew the way now. I never played with Diane again, either.

Mama's faith was strong. Mama didn't have to be "born again." She simply believed with a simplicity honed over the years to the bare bones. She and her mother-in-law (my grandmother Engle) attended services of sects anathema to the Catholic Church back in the days before Vatican II. Mama did it.

"My God says it is okay."

"It makes Grandma feel good."

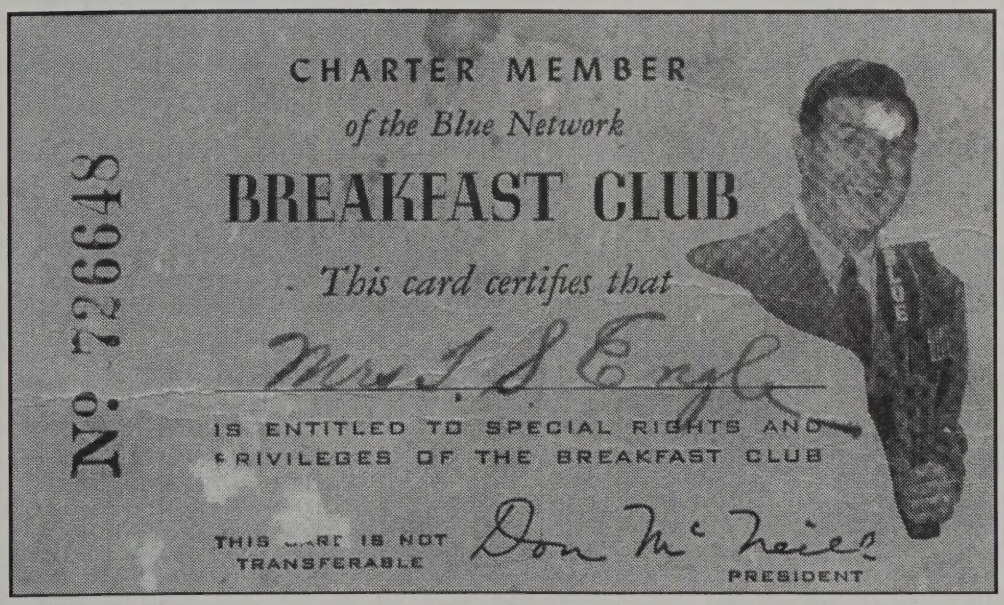
"What am I here for if not to do good?"

There's a lesson here someplace.

We buried the lifeless body of my mother February 12, 1993. It hurt to see her inert in that shell of a body that suckled me. I will probably cry out to hear her tongue wag. Not today, but someday. She's with Daddy now and I'll give them some time together before I start asking for their help—again.

It occurred to me that our family is now scattered. We aren't regular cemetery visitors for good reason: my family are very good haunters. They visit me. Mama's friends asked what they could do in her memory. Help a Humane Society, plant a tree, strew some wildflowers. Pick up some trash and do it in Lorraine's name.

Mama was a character, and genes will out. "Bye, Mama, we will see you later. Can you write me a letter of reference?"



Mama's membership card in *Don McNeill's Breakfast Club* of radio days

The Holidays

Like herding cats or Roquemores, getting a Christmas photo of all seven of us was one step beyond impossible. From left, Mush-Cat, Davy, Max the miniature dachshund, Mama Sue, Steven, Dave, Jim. Behind Dave is a pneumatic ball attached by tube to the camera, to be squeezed at the right moment. Say "Cheese."

Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, birthdays: these all appeared in my columns over the years. Sometimes I wrote of them in real time as a report of times present. More than likely I was reminiscing—memories of times and people past—stories of my family or a special tradition. Sometimes I'd get brave and look into the future.

Now, the Future is Today. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Faces and Names change. Or do they?

Let's go back 25 years and re-visit some of our New Years' Resolutions, laughed over at the time and then promptly forgotten. Fast forward and smile: some of those resolutions are still warming the back burners of my soul.

When once I was the prima-donna daughter or daughter-in-law dragging out the big bird to the dining table, this year David and I were treated as the regal grandparents that we are. There were pies

and cakes on the buffets and souffles and gravies and green beans on the table and stuffings and breads alongside the turkey and the ham. There were meals of leftovers, familiar yet new.

We remember some of the traditions that my own parents promoted: one popular even today at Christmas time is the newspaper wrapped gift...the old movies shown at least once during a visit...and always a cat or other pet in the middle of the gifts...and underfoot in the kitchen.

And so with family gathered round we sail headlong into a new year of making memories while remembering the old—and sometimes not knowing which is which—assured that these will go on forever and so they shall.

The more things change the more they stay the same—in Our Days of Auld Lang Syne.

Thanksgiving is Family

November 1989

Over the river and through the woods from Atlanta, Gainesville, Orlando and Zephyrhills, they'll converge in Cedar Key for Thanksgiving Day.

It is a command performance! Grandmothers will bring pies and breads and children will bring themselves and friends and healthy appetites. Dads will shuck oysters. Thanksgiving is family.

It is a time to say to each other "Thank you for being my family."

My children were terribly afraid that I'd forego the traditional turkey feast in favor of some nouvelle cuisine or buffet. No matter that it is impossible to fit all of us around the table. There is a certain charm about watching Dave struggle valiantly with carving an oversized bird with his elbows in the mashed potatoes, finally giving up and taking the thing to the kitchen. He will at least one time question: "Is this thing done?"

Thanksgiving is a time to remember and miss those people who are no longer at our table. It is a time to look into now grown up faces who once asked: "Do I have to eat the peas?" And my own voice echoing back, "Just try them."

The same tired jokes will be told again. We will hear Grandma telling how Grandpa spent all day baking the pies and Dave will give me credit for shooting the turkey. We will recall the year that the electricity went off mid-roasting and the time the plumbing backed up. We'll think of Aunt Lynn's sweet potato souffle and how no one made it like she did and how I wouldn't even try!

If Thanksgiving is looking back, it is also a day to rejoice in the present: good friends, good family.

Thanksgiving is the day when organized people start writing their Christmas cards that were purchased on sale January 2nd. It is a day when some of us try to recall the last time we got a Christmas card mailed before January 2nd.

Late November in Florida is very special. We cannot expect snow or sleet. We can see the subtle changes that have occurred. The cedars are bolder and appear bigger. The pines are a little more stately as some of their oak neighbors are now bare. Grasses are a tawny color and the wildflowers—a few valiant red blooms still peek up and around their gray-brown friends. Animals are friskier. Families are friskier. What is a better way to celebrate this season, than with a Thanksgiving.

Let there be no "Bah, Humbugs" in Cedar Key.

The Gift that Was

December 1988

Once upon a time, in a town not too far away, lived a little girl who most of all wanted a bicycle of her own from Santa.

It mattered not a whit to this child that she was only five years old and that her legs would barely dance back and forth on regulation pedals. She'd had a brake-less baby bike for over a year, but it really wasn't hers. It belonged to Daddy's bicycle shop and sooner or later someone would call looking for just such a bike. Besides, the big yellow Western Flyer and silver Columbia that her brothers rode were fast and exciting.

She rode in their baskets, on their luggage racks and on the cross-bar, but try as she might, she just couldn't swing her legs far enough to the left, then right, to keep that big frame moving and upright on her own.

As children do, she prayed that Santa would find just the right bike for her, and with the confidence that is only given to children, she knew it would happen.

She knew that her daddy refurbished bikes for a living. It didn't occur to her to ask Mama or Daddy for the perfect bike. As is the way with some children, she knew they couldn't afford it. It had to be blue with cream colored striping. Santa would know.

Over the long fall and into the winter she tried the boy's bikes, stretching the short legs and tip-toeing the pedals. The rare girl's bike came into the shop one day. It was an ugly faded red, banged up and about the most unappealing thing this child had seen. She could, however, ride it.

One day the bike disappeared. The daddy explained that a customer wanted it for his young daughter. "That is business! Like it or lump it."

"It was an ugly bicycle. I don't want no *girl's* bike anyway!"

Grounded, or back to the thing that pedaled forward and backward with no brakes, the little girl was despondent.

Santa, however, was waiting for Christmas morning.

Inside the bungalow, it was cozy and warm. The tree was not yet lit, but with the faith that only five-year-olds possess, she crept from her bed knowing that a blue bike with cream stripes would be there. It was.

The Thirteen Days of Christmas

December 1989

Holiday

Seasons come and go and each one is special in its own way. This one will go down in memory as The Thirteen Days.

On the First Day of Christmas, my dear spouse said to me: "This year, no Christmas Tree!"

"No Christmas Tree? You've got to be kidding me!"

On the Second Day of Christmas, my dear spouse presented a house full of blue lights, very pretty sights, but no Christmas Tree!

On the Third Day of Christmas, an artificial tree!

On the Fourth Day, I cried, I thought I would die—without a real-life Christmas Tree. On the same day I thought that I ought to just give in to misery.

On the Fifth Day of Christmas what should appear in the rain, out of no where, a sand pine so beautiful, she made every care disappear!

On the Sixth Day of Christmas we decorated the tree. Baffled by her ornaments and by my soggy sentiments, she started weeping needles all over me. There was the macaroni cardboard tree that insects had eaten long before. There was the elf that reminded me of Jim in Grade Four. The tears were Christmas tears, a collection of years.

On the Seventh Day of Christmas, my true love said to me: "Do you want to have a fire?" We stocked the woodpile and started a pyre. The house was a-smoke, and I did certainly choke. We opened the windows for fresh air.

On the Eighth Day of Christmas, we rapped and wrapped. We dust-busted the house. The weather turned grim, but we continued to get into the spirit. Brothers and sons would be home any minute.

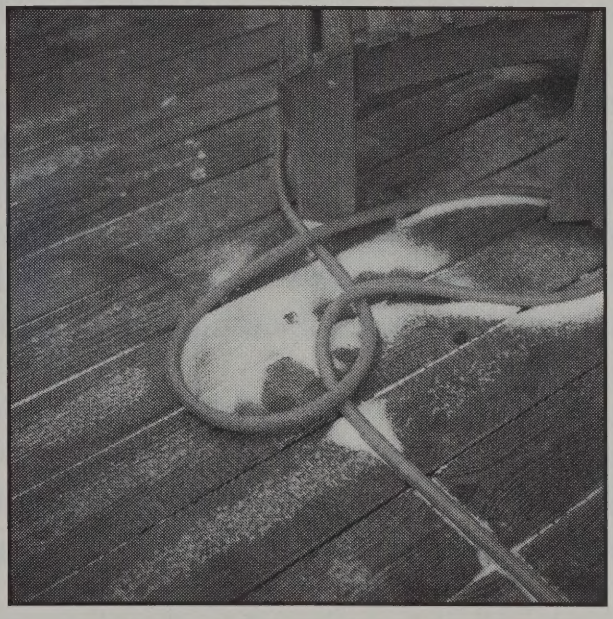
On the Ninth Day of Christmas, we lost all heat. With the temperature hovering about 30, this wasn't so sweet. The north wind was blowing and the little stove gave us nothing but soot. I cooked and baked, my joints all ached. My patience was reaching its limit.

On the Tenth Day of Christmas, the water pipes froze. Even the garden hose. With no heat and no water we tried to survive, expecting sons to arrive—from I-75—when we learned that road was closed. We tried printing pictures and found that the whole roll of film had somehow been over-exposed!

On the Eleventh Day of Christmas with the children all safely assembled, logs on the fire, and ice cubes melting in the microwave for water, it occurred to us that this was a Christmas to remember!

On the Twelfth Day of Christmas the sun came out and the pipes cleared. A toilet was flushed—but the sound was drowned by the cheers.

On the Thirteenth Day of Christmas, which is today by my records, with water and heat restored, I'll remember the Christmas that was without those frills. Still, I'll remember the warmth of the smiles. I'll remember the shrugs and the hugs and the water jugs. (And hope we don't have quite the same experience again for years!)



The Great Snowfall of 1989

Ethelred the Unready

December 1989

My friend Margaret is a little bit older than I am. If ever there was a person who has a more cluttered brain than mine, it is she. She readily admits to this distinction and I think is pretty proud of knowing trivia about trivia. We both glory in our stories, thus contributing to each other's Fibber McGee closet of gray cells. What we were carrying on about the other day was was about a friend of hers who was a Russian, born in China, who emigrated to the United States. He dubbed himself "Ethelred, the Unready." If ever there was

his female counterpart, it is "Susan, the Slow."

The hurrieder I go, the behinder I get. The more I clean up, the bigger mess I make. Now the subject is "Ethelred, The Unready," not "Susan the Slow." If ever the Ethelred comes out in me, it is at Christmas time. I ordered cards in July. They came and were rained on. This meant that by the time they were ready to be addressed, all the glue on the envelopes had either disappeared or was bound to the other face like epoxy to a Volkswagen bumper. I mailed five cards the day after Thanksgiving, addressed a few more, and had to buy another roll of scotch tape which of course put me well into December and the Christmas holidays. It took me that long to get through the check out line at Wal-mart with my roll of tape. Some people will get no card this year (as usual) and some will get duplicates since my Rolodex decided to self destruct (explode is a better word) on December 3rd.

One of these years I will be ready for Christmas. Plum puddings, fruit cakes, and the fat tree decorated before guests arrive. We'll be watching a Bing Crosby movie instead of *Body Electric* when Santa comes down the chimney. I won't be looking around for straight pins to hold wrapping paper together or making flour paste to glue the ends of packages.

A week or so ago Salty "sezzed" that I never missed a deadline. [*Mike Raftis' column in the Beacon was titled "Salty Sez."*] Little does he know that I don't miss them, I am exactly 364 days behind in everything I do and that makes me one day ahead. Merry Christmas, 1989!

It's that Time of Year

This was destined to be the most practical of Christmases, in the quieter mode. Quieter, if you discount the fact that three young men and ladies were visiting hearth and home. Quieter, if you forget that their laughter and shouts can break crystal. Quieter, only if you understand that *quiet* is a relative condition that Steve faithfully records every Christmas morning. So far, the tape sounds like a Mack truck running through the living room—or maybe it is the eldest still asleep and snoring on the couch.

The turkey and ham were assembled in the oven along with the candied yams. Broccoli was relegated to the microwave. I began my hour-long whipping of the potatoes that were thought to be a little gravelly. I asked one of the girls present if she had any suggestions as to how to get lumps out of potatoes and she told me: "Use Hungry Jack" instant potatoes. (I like that girl more and more.)

We opened presents. I bought Dave a very romantic bathroom scale. The professional model. Everyone weighed in. It reminded me of the year he bought me the slot car track. We played for a half hour with that scale. At least, I didn't have to build it. One year I bought Dave a telescope. If you can imagine me building a telescope, you can imagine why we only see the dark side of the moon.

Knowing that David III was going to give Steve the microwave oven that I had given him a few Christmases ago, Steve received microwave popcorn, microwave dishes and a cookbook. (I know where his interests lay.) We were inspired to give Jim a Swiss Army knife that will do everything save *jimmying* a Brinks armored car. He can pare oranges while removing lugs from the Mazda. He can polish toenails and uncork wine bottles. David III now has two dictionaries of wines of the western world. (He sells spirits—and I don't mean the ghostly type.)

When I say this was a quiet Christmas, I am not exaggerating. Who else do you know spent Christmas Eve trying to fix a zipper on a newly purchased $350 leather jacket? Or putting ear-mite drops in cats' ears. (That was pretty exciting, if you know Miss Petunia!—the Slasher.)

My children are wonderfully practical and imaginative. The box that held my gift from Steven was huge and heavy. It was wrapped in a bag from Kash N' Karry and taped with duct tape. I knew he had not rendered down his ponytail palm or been out rock hounding. This mystery gift, he said, was "unisex." Tears streamed with laughter and sentiment as I opened the box: three years of the *Cedar Key Beacon*! Who but Steve would know that I had chopped my collection to smithereens doing some Garden Club books authenticating the activities of the Cedar Key Garden Club for entry into the awards competition for the state Garden Club organization?

Ours is not a traditionally religious family. Spirituality is a private matter most of the year. We've been challenged by evangelists who believe this approach wrong and have been made to feel a little

guilty on occasion. On Christmas Day we established a new tradition. Instead of one person saying grace, each person said something. Long-winded Susan thanked for family and friends. Steve said "Ditto," and added his words and around the table it went. It was nice. We will do it again.

Later that holiday—

I'll wear my pristine new Gator sweat shirt over the luscious Santa Fe Tee. I'll eat that caramel corn and banana bread and know that I am well loved. Jim left with some antique poker chips (after a rousing game or three). A practical Christmas? I loaned Jim the MasterCard to buy enough gas to get back to Atlanta. He bought me a lottery ticket and himself some sunglasses and put premium in his (formerly my) Mazda.

We never got around to making that homemade eggnog. We learned that a niece had a new baby. We learned that a friend died. We watched old pictures on the silver screen of our wall. Baby David, Baby Jim and Baby Steve; Mama Susan when she was fat and Father Dave when he was skinny. Those were the days and these are the days. It's that Time of Year.

It is the Time of Year to give thanks and pray that everyone is as happy as you are.

As Dave was leaving this morning he said: "How about going to those Day-After-Christmas Sales?" My eyes rolled around my head several times and I buried my face in the pillow. "Thanks, but I think I'd rather wash dishes."

Somehow, the kids had found my cordial glasses. They had also found every other glass in the house. Davy had prepared himself a turkey sandwich for breakfast and Jim an omelette. Recycling bottles was going to be a major event of the week for me here in Cedar Key.

It's that time of year when you look at grown sons and wonder how you ever did it?! They are such nice people. If the Christ-Child is the spirit of Christmas, then my kids are the spirit of Christmas Future. This was the week that was.

It's That Time of Year!

Be It Resolved!

A friend and I were talking the other day about cooking. I do not know how to go about cooking for two. When I make potato salad I go by the rule of sixes: six of everything. Either we wind up with potato salad as a main course for the next six weekends or I have to invent a picnic. Neither does my crock pot function unless it is full. The dishwasher cries out: "Give me your plates! Your tired, weary, chipped cups!"

David, in one of his rare fits of madness, bought an 18-pound turkey for the holidays. I'm hoping that he was including Valentines Day and the Fourth of July. "How do I love thee, turkey? Let me count the ways..."

This same friend said that she has trouble cooking for more than two. She's always running out of food when she has guests. My eyes rolled and Dave reminded me of the time he walked in and said "Which army is coming to dinner?" He's also the one who tells me kindly to inventory the pantry. "Why do you have five boxes of baking soda? Eight cartoons of rigatoni? Three jars of seasoned salt?" ("That's really four, dear.") Maybe this year I should get organized and learn to cook for two.

The first thing I shall do is to go to the butcher and tell him not to let me buy a whole corned beef. I'll then have to figure a way to find tiny little cabbages (brussel sprouts?). When I roast a chicken it will be a Cornish game hen. I'll buy ham by the slice and cheeses by the ounce. It won't be nearly as much fun as having gallons of soup bubbling on the stove and food oozing out of the refrigerator but time and meals march on.

I'll figure a way to freeze-dry laundry detergent. Never before has a giant-king-sized box lasted more than a week or so. It's strange how quickly mold grows on cookies when the children leave home, or how long a roll of tissue lasts in the downstairs bathroom without a son in residence.

1990 promises to be the Year of the Elegant Meal: Curly lettuce and cherry tomatoes, tiny little tea leaves, skinless chicken, bubbly bouillabaisse for two. No more wonderful leftover meatloaf or spaghetti sauce. No more refrigerated chocolate cake. No more cluttered racks of aging spare-ribs and 'taters. My resolve lasted approximately fifteen minutes. I then put two ham hocks into a pot

with lentils and broth and within an hour the kitchen smelled good. I chopped up the onions and tossed them in. Everything started to bubbling as usual and eventually found its way to the freezer. The cake was baking. I still have to go to the market for the cherry tomatoes. So much for "Resolve" in 1990.

New Years Resolutions and How to Avoid Them

December 1990

The secret to a good New Year's resolution is to be realistic and avoid them entirely or pick out something that is at least possible to achieve. Like—"Hey man, if you think I can resolve to gain ten pounds in the next year, you've got to be joking!" I have made some serious resolutions, however, for 1991. I resolve to cut the long distance phone bill down by at least two pages. I will not say mean things to my computer (that might be more difficult to achieve). This also goes for the printer, the smoke alarm, the dishwasher and the automobile and anything else that has more than one movable part or is plugged into the wall.

Before 1991 gets here, I will alphabetize my Rolodex. Do you know how disconcerting it can be to have fourteen Roquemore names scattered among twenty-six letters? How hard is it to have to memorize phone numbers so I don't have to try to look them up individually? But then, in 1991, I won't be calling anyway, so scratch that resolution!

There are in fact more things that I know are unrealistic than there are things that can be done. By this time next year I will still not have long fingernails. (That was a priority item when I was sixteen and I've just about given up.) I'd like to be able to say I'll quit smoking in 1991 but hate to take the money away from all those research teams who tell me how bad it is. Besides, if I did this, I'd probably gain those ten pounds and have to buy a new wardrobe which would take the money I'd saved on cigarettes and phone bills and I'd be back at Square One. Ah, rationalization is the key to Resolution Making. Let it be said that in the grand scheme of things, I am a wimp with resolutions.

I'm going to try to resist the urge to shout obscenities to people trailering airboats west on State Road 24. (I might rather try to quit smoking.) I'm going to try to learn to use the remote control on the TV and indeed find the power switch. (Why don't they call it "On" and "Off" anymore?) I'm going to learn a new function on the computer. This year, for example, I learned how to center things. Last year I learned how to turn it on. I resolve to do one kind thing a day—whether people like it or not. I resolve to get at least one suspicious stain out of the living room carpet. (There are several to choose from.) I'll wage war on the spider-condominiums. If this keeps up I might even resolve to grow fingernails (again).

Take heart all you resolution makers, 1992 will be here before we know it and we can start all over again!

Looking Over the Shoulder at 1991

January 1992

Dorothy Davenport gave me an appointment book in January. I used it faithfully until March 1st. It reappeared in July so I am not sure of anything that happened between those months. I became serious about writing my book and badgered Robin into copying everything I'd ever written for the *Beacon.* This is why the *Beacon*'s copier is the way it is. After reading everything I'd ever written for the *Beacon,* I am like I am.

I did 365 crossword puzzles in 1991, not counting the ones I found in recycling bins. I've written far fewer checks (since the Market installed MasterCard). I've driven the car five fewer days a week since Dave is here five days a week now. I've mastered the art of getting the green monster (Baby) into reverse when it is plied into service. In all it has been a fairly intellectually stimulating year.

In November, for example, I guest lectured at the University of Florida. This was a rare treat for those students who had never seen a real live Cedar Key person before. (Yes, Virginia, people *live* here.) Following in my mom's footsteps, I talked about folk medicine and home remedies. As Awards Chairman 1991, I met deadlines for Garden Club Books of Evidence. This meant that as of December 1st, I could begin shoveling out my room of no return. (Office De-

pot stock must have dropped the following week.)

Sometime in September Dave and I went to North Carolina. We don't go to watch the leaves change—we change them. He'd promised to make me a birthday cake. He forgot. We were too busy clambering around waterfalls and taking pictures with a camera that had a light leak. (So much for my career in photojournalism.) It was sometime during this fateful week that I suggested spending my next birthday at the other end of the Appalachian Trail. My life hasn't been the same since. I didn't realize that the northern end of the trail was in Maine. Neither did I expect to have to walk there.

Looking back at 1991 with a global telescope, I see things that hurt: wars that break homes and take sons and daughters. If 1991 has been but a fleeting memory, it has been one that has torn us as a country—but with that scar tissue, perhaps made us stronger. At the same time perhaps we are more sensitive to our fellows around the world.

1991 brought an end to the cold war that I have lived with most of my life. Before that it was a hot war. Maybe, just maybe, in this dawning 1992 we can put aside the "nobody-likes-anybody-very-much" attitude and live together in the family of Man. I, for one, am going to try.

If you're having trouble coming up with New Year's Resolutions, try these on for size:

1. Resolve to live with a messy car. Don't toss that dross out the window!
2. Pay to Spay.
3. Sing, don't preach a sermon.
4. Walk in an adversary's shoes to see if they might just fit you.
5. Before saying an unkind word, write yourself a letter and mail it. Twenty-nine cents can save a lot of heartache.

There is something nice about being almost fifty years old. I can get away with being philosophical. In other societies of other days I'd be given a cup of hemlock. Sensitive about age? Fifty sure beats being twelve and flat-chested!

Critters

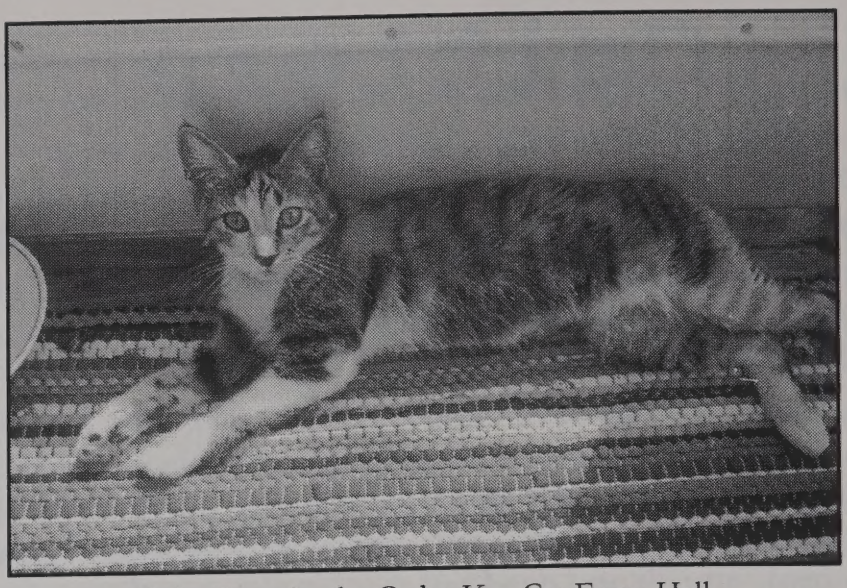
I have a special feeling toward animals. I like them until they do something to make me not like them. It's that way with people too. I am not fond of critters who think they are prima donnas and *that* goes for people too.

My pets have not been exotics though once I shared quarters with an (Emory University) lab mouse (the four-legged variety). He suffered under the care and treatment of some overzealous students who were studying the effects of argyrol on skin color. This white mouse was a blue mouse! Another brother brought home an orphaned flying squirrel. My sister had hamsters and gerbils and guinea pigs and horses! For myself it was cats, dogs, turtles and birds. I've not been afraid to meet up with the errant gator, snake or bat family, but I would hardly call them "pets."

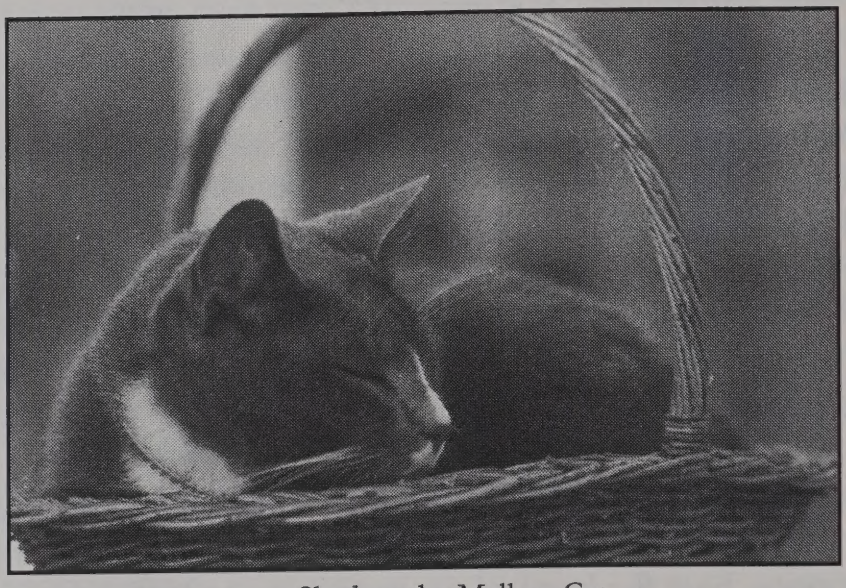
I've been privileged over the years to rub elbows (figuratively speaking) with bear, moose, wolf. A once in a lifetime trip to Africa allowed me to get up close to lion, zebra, elephant, hippos, wildebeest, rhinos, leopard and so many more beautiful creatures in their own habitat. I became enamored of the ungainly elephant grandmas doing "sitting" chores for the family with the babies. The blue tongued giraffe tickled my fancy and my face. Elands, dik-diks, gazelles…

I am an animal lover. Traipse with me over the years and through the fields and mountains of my life as we encounter the stinky hippos, hear the howl of the hyena on the highways. Urge the poky tortoise across the road… Watch out for the Kangaroo and is that a Koala bear I see in that tree? The parade continues. The pandas are at the bamboo… Let's go watch the whales…Closer to home we will hear the squeal of the wild hog and the shuffle of the armadillo, see the quizzical stare of the deer the deceptively sweet smile of the coon and the possum…

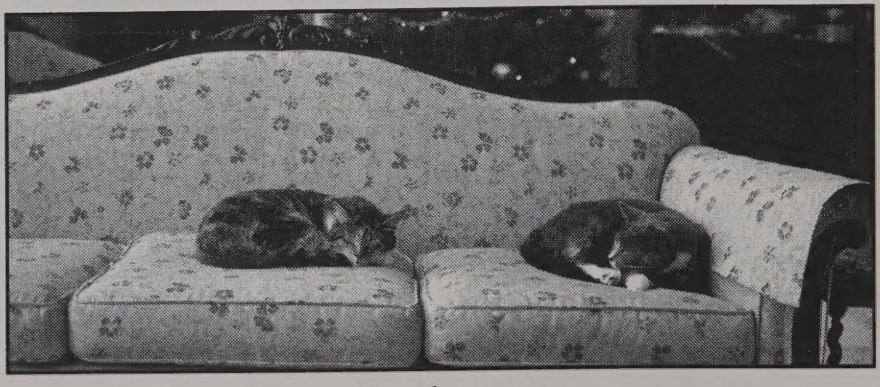
Back at the house a kitty-cat says "Meow" A dog woofs. "Where have you been? Arf Arf!" And *what* is that sound in the wall?



Miss Petunia, the Cedar Key Cat From Hell



Shadow the Mellow Cat



Togetherness

A Little Cautious about Cats? No Way! But Don't Tangle with Them

November 1988

Recently I've been engaged in more than one conversation about cats. Notice that I do not call them felines, or kitties or (God forbid) pussycats. My cats are *Cats*. They each have a given name but respond very nicely to the simpler version. If there is one thing more controversial than sewers or baseball games around Cedar Key, it is *Cats*.

The reason for this subject coming up so often is that a week or so ago my big gorgeous magnificent gray cat decided to go for a walk. He left no note and must have sworn his younger counterpart to secrecy. There wasn't much I could do about it except call the entire Cedar Key telephone directory and put ads in the *New York Times* and the *Beacon*. Also call each of the children and my mother. Each of these sources promised me at least three cats as a replacement. (It was curious to me how anyone could consider replacing a member of the household so casually. I couldn't).

In a matter of time, Shadow must have read the ad in the *Beacon* and realized that he was *missing*. Since he rarely carries spare change for telephone calls, it must have taken him some time to figure out where the cat hotline was located. About midnight, a week almost to the minute after his departure, the phone rang. (The voice did not say "Meow.") It was Janet Betts. "We have your cat over here... Bill was ready to shoot something in the fireplace with his shotgun—and then he realized it was a cat he knew."

Shadow knows Janet and Bill. On one occasion Shad sipped tea with Janet. They have visited in our house many times but to my knowledge this was Shadow's first visit to them. How and why did he choose a family that understood my distress, recognized him, and was willing to make a midnight telephone call on behalf of an errant cat? What prompted Shadow to take off on a hike to begin with? Why did he hit the highway toward town, cross the road, follow their driveway down to their house on their own island. Why did he climb to their roof and what on earth propelled him down their chimney in the middle of the night? Had Shadow been reading some left over Christmas propaganda about Santa Claus? We will never know what went on in that cat's head. It's a story hard to

believe especially if you knew my cat!

Why is it that I find myself always defending cats?

I've had cats and dogs and fish and turtles and birds of every description. As a child I grew up around hamsters, squirrels and gerbils, guinea pigs and one *blue* white mouse. My parakeets ate cat food from the dish with the cats, dispelling the notion that cats do nothing but stalk birds.

My canary lost its head (literally) to another bird (Mom called it a "butcher-bird"). At this point and at this place I am more concerned with an owl carrying away a kitten than I am either of my cats attacking a mockingbird! Did you ever tangle with a mama mockingbird? Not pretty!

Before the days when anything was known about the feline leukemia virus or there was a vaccine for it, my Count Dracula contracted the disease. In his final days he lay sunning on a porch and the darling songbirds were using his fur to build nests. Nature is not all serenity.

Why is it beautiful to watch a pelican dive for fish and ugly for a cat to stalk a bird? Why is it wonderful to see an owl pick up a rat to feed its young and so repulsive when a cat brings in a mouse? Why can birds search for worms and eat our gardens at the same time with a minimum of restraint and a cat that uses that same garden as a litter box be abused?

Are we just a little afraid of cats? Probably. Contrary to popular belief, cats are not aloof, antisocial creatures. They have a sense of family and once made a member of the family are very loyal and territorial. There is a language that develops between the humans and the felines. Just like other creatures they can be stubborn, arrogant, have good days and bad days. They may not jump through hoops for you as you think of training a puppy to do, because a cat has a sense of dignity that is foreign to some other domesticated animals.

Miss Petunia is now about eight months old. She is a wicked little piece of calico. A true Cedar Key cat, born in a garage and parentage unknown. Far from dignified, she is a perfect example of pet-rearing. She does not leave her province; has claimed the tea cart in the sun for her own; tells me in loud voice when the dish is empty and generally does Shadow's meowing for him. They are bosom buddies. They run around together chasing butterflies. They

leave the osprey and owls alone. (I hope that is vice-versa.) The towhees and mockingbirds don't look too worried.

These cats are my friends. They will not reproduce (of that I am sure). I just don't understand the fear that people have about cats. My children have broken far more precious china than any cat; I am the only one who disasterizes car bumpers; they don't steal wrenches or leave ovens turned on. I don't have to give them baths.

Cats don't go to college. Cats don't require engagement rings. Oh Dear! A big bird just flew into the house and is doing things to my tapestry! Where's the *Cat*!?

A Curious Thing about Cats

December 1994

Cats have inspired poetry. They have plays written about their secret world: Gumbie Cats, Jellico Cats, Cheshire Cats, Hep-Cats and Fat Cats. You might be as nervous as a cat in a roomful of rocking chairs or react like a cat on a hot tin roof. If you talk about your neighbors, you are being "catty." It's nice to have cat-like grace, and the Father (in *Knows Best*) called his little daughter, "Kitten." (Did he call his wife "Cat?")

Cats have been idolized (lionized?) and feared, hated and eaten. Cats always command respect. You don't feel sorry for a cat no matter how badly indisposed. It's downright demeaning (to the cat) (and rather inane on your part).

Cats have been part of my life for as long as I can remember and no two cats were alike in disposition. We've never had a Cat From Hell (although Dave would disagree)—these are the kind that reputedly go for the throat, bite mailmen and meter readers (normal behavior for a dog, perhaps, but totally unacceptable in a cat!)

My childhood was punctuated by a series of Katanias. One of my first memories was of my mother liberally spreading Watkins Salve on the base of a Katania's tail and bandaging it carefully with a strip of old bedsheet (the treatment lasted for about an hour—fifteen minutes of bandage and forty-five minutes of licking). Katania, it seemed, was forever getting into fights and judging from the wound-sites, always retreating.

We should have known better than try to domesticate Smokey.

He was Persian with the instincts of the Shah. In those days, it was my duty to practice piano every afternoon at 4 PM. Unfortunately, this interrupted Smokey's afternoon siesta on the piano bench. Now Mama was applying Watkins Salve to *my* posterior! Smokey was a nice enough cat if you stayed away from *his* piano bench. I could dress him in my doll clothes and put him in my baby-carriage and stroll with him through my neighborhood.

We acquired Midnight as a runt of a litter nobody wanted. Our (female) dog (Butch) nursed Midnight back to health. Butch was rather ecumenical. During Midnight's tenure we moved across town but returned to the old house every day in preparation for its eventual sale. We also returned to the house to get Midnight who was always sprawled out on the wicker porch furniture—where he had loved to sleep right under the canary cage the year before. One day when he was "off-duty" from his post under the cage a butcher-bird (a kite) lured the canary to the bars of the cage and lopped off the canary's head. So much for where danger lays. His five miles a day in Tampa traffic cost us an arm and a leg in vet bills and Midnight at least three lives.

Enter Twinkle, probably the most physically gorgeous of any of my cats and the most depraved. Twinkle was an absolute pyscho, a nut case of the cat world! Full blooded Persian, she even had long eyelashes. This cat was pure white, a photographer's dream and an owner's nightmare. Twinkle's entire life was devoted to escaping the confines of the house. For some reason, my parents regarded her as inviolate and wouldn't allow her to do cat-like things outside. It may have never occurred to them to have her spayed (but I think they probably thought it was immoral). What was certain was that they didn't want her to have kittens. Twinkle had kittens. High-strung Twinkle died in kitten-birth. No more cats for awhile.

I married an avowed cat-hater. He barely tolerated our friends' Siamese, and my brother's cats sent him into fits of frenzy.

According to David (circa 1964), "Cats ruin furniture, shoot hairs at you, give you ringworm, are sneaky and smother small babies. They are foul tempered, demanding and eat smelly food."

What could I say?

One cold wet January night a kitten appeared on our doorstep and was allowed to spend the night. Mush was part of the house for the next eleven years. What a beast. He was Dave's cat from Day

One. I fed him and carried him to the vet for his shots; the children played with him; but it was Dave that he adored. I'd have to remind Dave (as Mush was sleeping on his head) that I'd hate for him to be "smothered." Dave had become a cat person.

No one could identify the cause of Mush-Cat's sudden anemia: he needed six units of cat blood immediately! I authorized the transfusions—but was astounded that I'd also have to supply the donor cats! My friend, Joan, and I rounded up her three cats—one from a rooftop—and later cat "Mush" survived that bout. CD (Count Dracula) got his name from his kittenish way of nipping at the carotid artery. Coal black and eternally playful, he was master of the manor for many years until he too succumbed to the now-identifiable Feline Leukemia virus.

"BB" was a different cat. She too was coal black, but tiny. This cat had some brain disorder that caused her to misjudge distances. She'd leap from the ground to our back porch and miss the space between the rails and *smack* into the wrought iron. She did this so many times, but would always get back up with that inborn dignity that said "I didn't do that!" BB tangled with one too many possums one night.

My friend Joan suggested that I not get another cat for awhile. This funeral procession was getting on her nerves.

We've always lived in places where we thought the cats could be allowed outdoors. They thought of themselves as house cats but happily did their duties outside. Clearly, even though now fortified with new vaccines and neutered, my cats were having problems with longevity.

And along comes Shadow. Originally called Gray-Kitty or Grayki by my sister (she always was one for clever names), he was the biggest and fattest and orneriest of the new litter of her cats. He is a gray cat: the kind that has fur rather than hair. I brought him home from Tampa to Orlando in the hatchback of my Mazda RX-7, supposedly secured under a laundry basket. Someplace about 15 miles into Interstate 4, this few ounces of kitten removed the basket and the brick that held it down and found his way to the top of my head. There was going to be trouble ahead with this cat. I returned home that afternoon just before my children were to come in from school. They knew that I was bringing them a kitten. I put down water and spooned out some kitty chow. At the time we also

had a miniature dachshund—Maximilian.

"Where's the cat, Mom?"

"Eeeek! you opened the door!"

For the next three hours we searched our neighborhood for one little gray ball of fur—who had already staked out on his own the few inches he required between our bed pillows for a good nap.

Shad does all the things that cats do and is exceptionally sociable. He is a talker and exchanges greetings with visitors to the house and does house calls as well. Everyone in Orlando along our dirt street knew Shadow. It came as a surprise to me when I received a call from an ailing neighbor threatening to kill my cat "if he eats another blue jay." (I was still smarting from my experience with Dracula and the mockingbirds using his fur for nest-building!) "Mr. A, if you do that, then I won't call 9-1-1 the next time you have a heart attack!" (I sent his family a blueberry cobbler when he died but I did not mourn.) Just a month or so before, Shadow arrived home one afternoon and lay down on the floor next to a son's bed—he had a crushed skull and his eye was bleeding. Someone had kicked him in the head or delivered a blow with a blunt instrument, the vet said. His hip had been fractured. Shad was put back together with steel and plastic and artistry. He's a little cross-eyed.

Shadow moved to Cedar Key with us in 1987. He took up residence in this island community in a rental house and made friends with the neighbor's cats. They lay there on a common wall talking old-man-type gossip. When his elderly cat-friend Leonard died, Shadow was inconsolable. He'd mewl. He lost weight. We were then given Petunia. Boy, was Shadow ever so happy! *No!* If I was thinking that these two would ever be buddies, I wasn't imagining what would really happen: they became "family."

We moved again to a permanent home surrounded by a wildlife refuge. Petunia is now seven years old. Shadow is at least ten. The years have been good to them. Miss Pee–the closest I've ever had to a Cat From Hell—has learned to enjoy creature comforts. She goes ballistic at the sight of a spray can or the suggestion of a ride in the car. She deftly removes collars, leaps tall pillars and posts with a single bound and can hold a pack of dogs at bay with a single cat word. The two of them spend several months out of every year totally out of doors; fed each day by friends. It takes them about thirty minutes to become house cats again upon our return, snuggling into the soft

down of a living room chair or sprawled on a hearth rug.

Shadow still drives me crazy when the phone rings or when I sit at the keyboard. I dutifully step to and stir his food. He'll smack through screens with his bulky body. Miss Petunia runs errands for him and tells me when he wants in or out. Shad paws my face awake every morning if I sleep past 7 AM (8 Daylight Time). Neither of them expect Dave to feed or water them and won't ask him ever.

My cats aren't peculiar. They are Cats and each one is a One and Only.

Shadow takes me for a walk

Ichabod, the Hiking Cat, and Others

A few years ago, when I was traipsing through the Green Mountains of Vermont with nothing more on my mind or conscience than getting my left foot in front of my right for the next five or so hundred miles, I chanced upon Ichabod. He was pussyfooting over some stones in a stream, inspecting ferns. He was doing a much better job than his mistress (at the other end of a tether) keeping dry but she was game enough, and clearly having fun with her *feral beast.* Ichabod looked like a normal everyday housecat: black and white short-hair—no exotic breeding for this type of activity. "Do you do this often?" I ventured. "Oh, yes! Every chance we get! Ichabod loves hiking!" I figured that I had met one of those strange people that one hears about on the Appalachian Trail and scurried up the next mountain.

It wasn't until much later that I discussed this chance meeting with my own cat. He assured me that anything anyone named Ichabod could do, he could do better—but to go light on the water—and that he had his own idea's about this hiking thing. For the next trip Dave and I took, we outfitted Shadow with a new collar, affixed his appropriate jewelry (tag) to it, and bought him a length of lightweight leash. That was acceptable, as far as it went, and that was about as far as Shadow went that day. If his normal color hadn't already been blue-gray, I'd have been convinced he was cyanotic. Magically, his head shrunk enough to get out of the collar. How did he do that? No sense in tightening the collar. I already knew that he'd either only shrink his head further or he'd choke to death. We decided on a matching harness—and Houdini cat was out of it and up a tree. Clearly, we were doing something wrong.

Shadow is a very big boned cat: in his heyday he was a trim fifteen-pounder. We found a more traditional dog-type harness that fits like a collar, then under his belly, with a vertical strap between his shoulder blades. More importantly, we bought a second section of leash, allowing him a 12-foot lead (not that we moved twelve feet total that first afternoon). We smelled car tires a lot and groomed our bellies. Shadow was thoroughly enjoying having me at the end of the leash: in such a fashion I passed Cat Psychology One-Oh-One.

It's probably not so much that Shadow likes to travel as that he doesn't want to stay home alone. He recognizes all the signs of an impending trip. He inspects the trailer to be sure that his cat box is there—but "why hasn't she put the food bowl in yet?" Switch-Switch goes the tail! "And don't forget your leash!"

We don't always travel with the trailer but head on down to Grandpa's house in Orlando for a few days at a time. Here, Shadow is confined to the house or to supervised walks. Out we traipse every morning at dawn's early light. The routine has become predictable. Tire sniffing. That's Dad's car, okay. Then sidewalk cracks: same as yesterday, no overnight earthquakes. Decision time: right or left? There's this mockingbird nest to the left: let's go that way and harass her a little. Manicure job on the first oak on the right in the parkway. Scratch-Skritch. "Ahhh, that hangnail was bothering me all night. She's going to tell me I can't cross the street so don't even think about it. That driveway on the left smells like cat: there he is:

let's have a staring match. Which one of us should hiss first? Oh heck, I've got to find a hole fast: knew I shouldn't have drunk all that water last night! C'mon, woman, move!"

My own arm gets pulled from its socket as we streak down the suburban sidewalk, put on brakes at the corner and make a sharp left to another tree: the one with soft sand at its base. All hurry ceases and inspection begins. Sniff sniff and a few peremptory thrusts into the ground. "No, No, this won't do. Did *you* ever sit on an acorn, Woman? Don't look at me that way. In fact, I'd prefer if you don't look at all. A gentleman has his modesty, for Godsake! Now, give me time to get the hole covered up properly. Why are humans so impatient?"

The best hikes I've taken with my Ichabod-Shadow are those in the woods. This cat thinks he is a Bengal Tiger, stalking the wild azalea. So many trees, so little time. I heel under branches, over logs: he seems to understand that I just don't fit some places that he does, so he just looks disgustedly at me and comes back to my rescue. I just remind him of the time that he went ballistic at the sight of a bunny rabbit and that makes us even. Barking dogs don't faze him, but tourists coming out of bathhouses can send him into utter cat-panic. (Some of them look pretty frightening, 'tis true.)

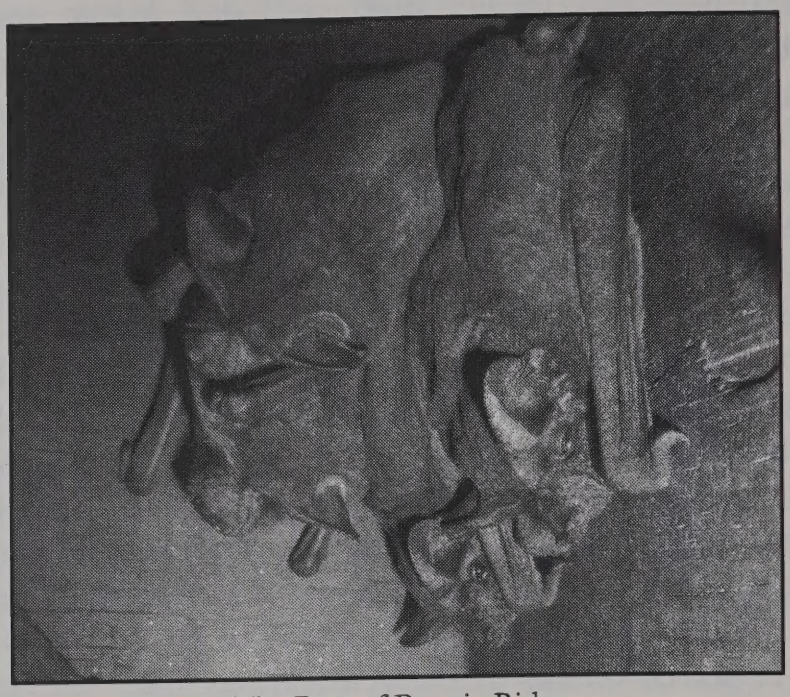
The advanced course of being led around by a cat on a leash reminds one never to tether the cat to a stake. The only reason they tolerate the harness and leash is that you are on the other end. There is no question that it is easy enough for them to get out of any strait-jacket devised by man, if they so choose. This brings up a very real problem: Shadow likes the idea so much that de-briefing him at home takes some doing: he wants *me* to walk around the yard with him for days after we return: with *me* on the end of the leash! He stares at his red leash hanging from the key rack: "C'mon it's time for your walk. Let's go sniff some tires!"

A present day comment: In 2001, Shadow spent his last summer at our log cabin in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, dying at the ripe old age of 18. He numbered among his friends jackasses, cows, wild turkeys and deer—and fortunately left the coyotes and bear alone. In 2003 we were neck deep in reconstructing our log cabin. A persistent if tiny voice came mewling from under a wood stove temporarily stashed on the front porch. A baby cat no bigger than my hand reached out and grabbed my heart. David said, "Don't feed that cat"—

but of course I did. "Romeo" became a part of the family. He is our "Virginia Coon Cat."

Bats in the Belfry

October 1991



The Bats of Boogie Ridge

It's been suspected for yea, many a year, but it has now been confirmed: I have become declared officially "batty." I come from a long line of "old bats." This condition of battiness was confirmed when I told Dave that all I wanted for Christmas was a Bat House. I am quite serious. I love my bats. The cats love my bats and the bats love the bugs. I just feel it is entirely proper to build them their own condominium and encourage their romps through the evening skies slurping up the mosquitoes and getting fat on the no-see-ums.

Bats are one of those much maligned species that gets blamed for everything from blood sucking to rabies, fleas, ticks, mites to mood changes. Most of this folklore stems from stories about vampire bats which are reportedly rare in the U. S. and will not be welcome at my exclusive apartment complex here on Boogie Ridge should they care to apply. My bats are insect eaters, and according to David A. Brody of the American Museum of Natural History in

New York City, a bat can consume up to 600 mosquitoes in an hour! They should be fat and sassy in no time here in Cedar Key.

There are about six varieties of bats common to Florida, with others possibly migratory to the area. As batty as I might be, I am no expert on bat identification and am not sure what variety flits around my deck at dusk and those darlings that fall prey to my felines don't get close anatomical inspection before burial.

My first experience with learning to love bats came when I was about eight years old. My brother Tommy was engaged in a bat-banding project in Georgia. How *gross!* The idea was to trace the migratory habits of the Georgia bats and also check for rabies. They concluded that bats were getting a bad rap. He, an avid spelunker, didn't enjoy disturbing the cave bats. They became excited and could indeed get tangled in hair and clothing. They also had "bat-cooties"—but name a wild animal who doesn't have some creepie-crawlies and I'll show you a fish who bathes daily.

We also saw bats at dusk in Tampa and in Orlando. One particular morning I was on my way across a breezeway to our garage apartment in our Orlando home to do something domestic like hang wallpaper. There, between the two rooms was a *bat* hanging from the light fixture over my head, sound asleep and snoring, for all I knew. I don't make it a practice to go around killing things unless they are biting me or shooting at me. This baby, about three inches long, was curled up and doing neither. The fact remained that I didn't want it in my house and had no earthly idea of how to remove it without possibly getting bitten or scratched.

Bats are not birds (they are mammals) but I called the Audubon Society anyway. They informed me that bats were not birds. (Thank you.) I called an exterminator who said he'd come over and kill it. (No thank you.) I called the Freshwater Fish and Game Commission and they told me I was crazy. (Thanks.) I called my friend, Joan who suggested I open the door and at night it would probably fly out. (Now, we are getting reasonable.) Finally, a professor of biology at the University of Central Florida told me to put a paper sack around the bat at the light fixture and tap it with a broom. The bat will fall into the sack and I could take it, sack and all, outside. The bat slept through the entire procedure and lived a long and happy life—I presume out of doors—but probably had a few "bat-mares" about the broom episode.

Bats are truly a gift to those of us who live on the edges of the wild. They are cheaper, more efficient and healthier for us to employ than pesticides or zapper-electronic gadgets. They are fun to watch, dipping and swooping and diving. It's only fitting then, that I want to treat them as honored residents—as batty as that sounds.

The Wolf In My Life

We had been hiking in the Adirondacks for several weeks. We had discovered another challenge: climbing forty-six Adirondack mountains, each believed to be higher than 4,000 feet. We were ten mountains into becoming "Forty-Sixers," when I got very tired of climbing every day. Peaks, if you haven't experienced them, are a little rough around the edges. The trails start out wide and touristy. The next mile will take you up some rocks and ridges and it is likely that the last mile will be straight up. Quite nice, if you are into climbing peaks. I am. I like summits, especially if I and my love are there together with a picnic lunch, but time had come for us to do something other than gird our loins for the next morning's climb.

"Sweet Love of My Life...Can't you find me something level to walk on?"

"I mean it, let's go someplace where I can stretch these gorgeous legs. Maybe be eye-level with something other than the squirrels?"

I won't tell you what he called me other than "wimp," but he agreed that I needed a break. We spent a few days with a tourist package of the Lake Placid Olympic sites. It's clear that I could never be an Olympic skier: that lift was enough to scare me to death! "I'll walk down!" We'd hiked up White Face Mountain (and were snowed on) and I didn't let out a whimper, but the safe gondola was too much!

We headed for Algonquin Provincial Park. That's in Ontario. Strange things happen to late summer travelers: parks close early, and when you are working with a book that is ten years out of date, it is curious as to whether a park exists at all. Call it adventure. We wanted to do some backcountry hiking. It's so hard to decide ahead

of time when you don't know the lay of the land, how much time you want to spend, or how fast you will hike. My thinking is very conservative. I never ever believe how good I am or how fast I go or that I am among the damn good hikers of the world.

We've done enough backcountry hiking to understand the "givens" of the trail: for the first day "in" the trail is marked by toilet tissue, gum wrappers and cigarette butts, aluminum cans and orange peels. It was enough to make me welcome the emergence of animal scat. (Can we take a picture of that?) I stopped my boot mid-air among the tree roots: "Oh!" I'd never seen a snake in the wild slurping up a frog. Snakes don't move well while eating, so I stood there poised and staring. The garter snake wasn't going any place with a frog in its mouth, so I put my foot down carefully and said "Bon Apetit." We'd met a young Danish man on his first trip to North America and he'd questioned us about snakes. Where was he when I could have shown him one of the wonders of the world this morning?

It is our habit for me to hike ahead of Dave. The reason for this is that Dave needs the exercise (Ha!). The reason for this is that I can find the snakes easier. The real reason for this is that the last time I was behind him, he got lost. (Believe whichever reason you choose.) Even though a few paces behind me, he said: "Look at that!"—a mother squirrel was hauling her baby down a big tree. The baby didn't want to go. "Why is she doing that?" We were getting into the outback and into that mood of playful camaraderie that happens when we are away from exhaust fumes and telephones. Dave talks to butterflies too, but don't tell anyone I said that.

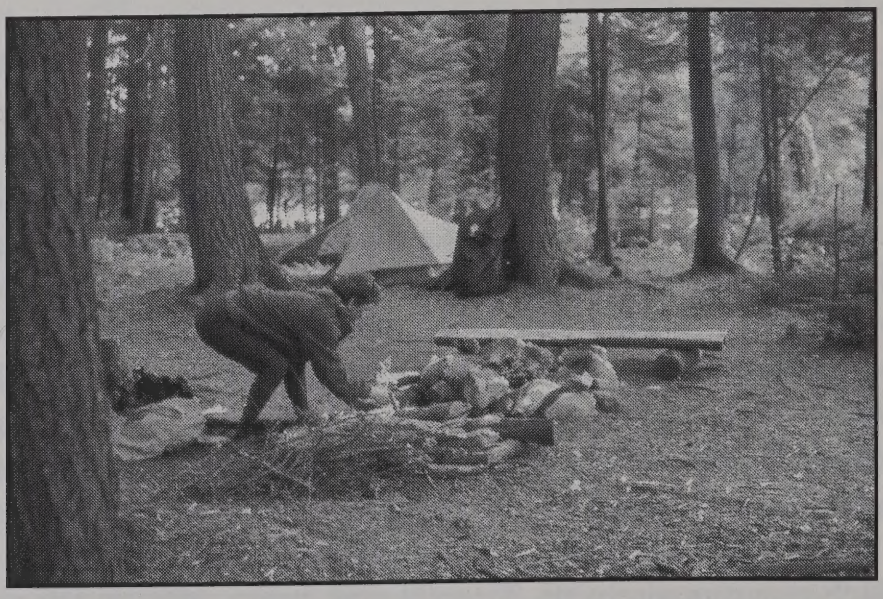
Each day was a rebirth. The colored leaves of early fall painted the landscape. We hopped over itty-bitty streams that in the spring would be swollen from snow melt. It wasn't exactly flat land but the trail was well marked and getting from Point A to Point B wasn't confusing. There was evidence of moose and bear but we hadn't seen much in the way of wildlife. David called and was answered by a couple of loons. Loons are familiars. Loons have forty-nine calls and he has perfected most of their voices. I was afraid once that he was going to be mugged by a gang of loons (what *did* he say to that girl?)

We did about 12-13 miles a day. Our packs were bare-bone light. I lie. David was carrying more at the outset, but we ate the

food! I like carrying the gear because it fits so nicely. Unfortunately, I am still carrying the pot and stove while all of his ramen noodles are gone at the end of four days!

Hiking is rarely exciting unless you get unglued by a river where it shouldn't be or by animals where they should be. It's the most relaxing of pastimes and is cheap living if you don't mind looking like a vagrant.

The third evening out proved to be an exception to this rule. We were tired, but had opted to go another couple of miles to the pre-determined site: Lake Teal. There's something very reassuring about getting tired at the same time your trail partner does. You have a certain knowledge that as soon as you eat dinner no God in heaven will keep you from going to a sound, but weird dream-filled sleep.



Our campsite on Teal Lake just before *my* wolf arrives

Teal Lake looked good. The carved niche of a campsite was okay. It takes us about a minute to put up the Clip Flashlight (our one and one-half person, tap-on-the-shoulder-to-turn-over, tent) and when I am hungry even less time than that to start dinner. There's no question that this is a sexist operation: I cook camp fare better than Dave—and faster. He is better at snapping together tent and sleeping bags and getting water. We are, at the end of a hiking day, a cool running machine. We are quiet. It was a little unnerving then to hear the sound of chopping wood at the next campsite. So much for the wilderness experience! To say that I was annoyed isn't

fair. I just didn't really care. We laughed over the fact that Dave's pack was now two pounds lighter and mine had another layer of soot. I'd built a twig fire while he was doing what men do when they vanish.

Crash! From the direction of the wood-choppers came bounding an animal.

"Dave, is that a moose?"

"Susie, that is a Canada-sized deer!"

He ran for the camera. Bambi's dad schlepped through our waterfront property with no time to waste. I was impressed. I was counting its velvet covered points and stopped at eight. Wow! I put the pot in the bag and stirred the fire. Should I gather more wood? It was that pretty time of day when it is half green and half gold and your body says "go to bed," but your mind wants to paint pictures.

"David! Look at that dog!" I half expected a human to be trailing behind. "David!? That isn't a dog!" I was mesmerized by the knowledge that I was in on seeing a real wolf. Dave was aiming his camera across the lake, composing his wolf picture, his back to me.

"Dave...oh Dave... There is a *wolf* here!"

"I know, I am taking a picture of it…"

"No, you aren't! This one is standing right here with me!"

He was. She was. The animal was standing two arms lengths from me. She cocked her head quizzically. I cocked mine and our eyes made contact. She didn't know what I was doing there in her path and I sure as hell didn't know why she was there in my campsite. She looked almost exactly like my brother's domestic malamutes that he raised in Tampa. She/he was a healthy, big boned, silver-tan. Her eyes were intelligent and bore no wild motive. I was probably her first human and she was certainly my first wolf. She didn't want to eat me—she was after that deer! She bounded over the tent before I caught another breath.

We found out later that our encounter was rare and very special. Every so often a tourist complains of a lobo (a solo wolf) who causes problems—usually a starving or displaced animal. This one was a healthy member of a known pack, living just exactly as it should live. Wolves are shy critters. I'm a shy critter. Maybe that's what I saw in her eyes.

The last week in August the rangers of Algonquin Park have a show. They invite folks to come to a designated highway spot and

listen to them "howl-up" wolves. They call and the wolf pack will answer from the distant hills. On the last such "howl-up" 2,000 automobiles were present on the highway.

We missed it by a week.

We missed nothing. I had my very own wolf for a full minute of my life.

Scratch Scratch—Itch Itch —It's Summer Time

Most of us, if at all familiar with the great out of doors, are familiar with the bugs of summer. What we may not realize however is that Florida has no corner on the bug market.

I have always believed there is a purpose for all of God's creatures and espouse the "food chain theory." It's just that when I become part of that food chain I get upset. Once in the Everglades we missed all of comet Khahoutek's display for the shroud of "Off" in the air. I defied a ranger to tell me in five words or less of what earthly value was the mosquito. He replied, "They feed the frogs." (Four words.) "Mosquitoes are an important part of the environment." I looked at him in amazement: "Like endangered species or what?" Obviously, it wasn't that simple. Mosquitoes bite animals, frogs eat mosquitoes, rodents eat frogs, birds eat rodents, people eat birds. It isn't that simple either since I couldn't figure out whether I was at the bottom or the top of this chain. I'd sooner cut out the middlemen and just eat the mosquito in the first place, instead of the other way around.

Another time, while sleeping in a patch of blueberries in Minnesota's *deep woods*, I realized how the popular insect repellent got its name. What a marketing coup! The advertising man must have slept in the same thicket.

Most of us know how to handle a mosquito: spray or rub on some goop before the attack. Insect repellents are pretty effective if put on the skin before you encounter a swarm of these beasts. The Army developed a really good product for use in southeast Asia. I happened across some surplus a few years ago. It feels like crankcase oil, smells like bear grease and it works. I hope we don't have

to have another war before I find more of this stuff. After the fact about the only thing that works is scratching ankles raw and applying alcohol (to the ankles, not internally). The stinging is so intense that it makes you forget the itch. Never mind the fact that now your ankles are quilted.

Florida mosquitoes may not be the biggest but I can honestly say they are the meanest I've ever encountered. Alaska has monsters and Minnesota and Wisconsin both claim the mosquito their state bird. These guys flap their wings and take ten minutes circling the field before touch-down. You can catch them with a net and mount them for a wall before they get a chance to bite. If you don't believe that I can tell you that I once spent some time in the north woods with mosquito netting not much finer than a mullet seine. You run a lesser risk of suffocating from inhaling them than you do from clawing yourself to death here at home.

I'm told that our special mosquitoes are bred in the salt marshes. Where are our salt marsh toads that the ranger was talking about? Maybe we should inaugurate a "Take a Toad to Dinner" night or a national "Toad Week." We can use all the help we can get here in Cedar Key.

Meanwhile, I'll just slather on the snake oil and fire up the smudge pots on the deck and hope that the wind blows them the other way.

Most of us are also fairly knowledgeable about the no see um or sand fly. In this case we douse ourselves liberally with a watered down version of a bath oil. (The manufacturer must think there are a lot of well-bathed people since they refuse to acknowledge the product's use for this purpose.) The fact is, it works. Other folks claim baby oil works just as well but it is my contention that all it does is trap the little critters—or maybe gag them.

As a person who attracts bugs (and gets bitten) I make it a point to understand the bug's lifestyle, psyche and feeding habits before locking the outside door. It came then as a surprise when we were trekking around the Ocala Forest one day that suddenly two of our party—the two who had been reading under a tree while the others fished—came down with a raging case of the itchies. Upon closer investigation, they were covered with tiny mite-like creatures. Creepy crawly things no bigger than a pin head with legs. It had taken me nearly forty years of living in Florida to see what a grown

up chigger looked like. I'd experienced lots of red bugs over the years and thought that this was what they were: something that burrowed under the skin, made a dandy welt, and itched like crazy. I learned differently. They are indeed a mite, and interestingly enough crawl on the prey until they reach an obstruction like a beltline and then settle down to dinner. They will then inject a digestive fluid into the skin which causes the swelling redness and itching. After feeding, the mite actually does drop off—although the itch remains. They are easy to deter: A simple, cheap way is to dust pant legs and beltlines body creases with powdered flowers of sulfur, available at any drug store. There is no point in doing what I did for yea those many years: picking the chigger out—since he's not there anymore.

Ticks are another story. Recently they have become more than just a nuisance: a real health threat. Ticks are another mite. They come in various sizes and will, if invited, attach themselves to the skin of animals and humans. Several species of ticks have been found to transmit Lyme disease, named after the town in Connecticut where the disease was first reported in 1975. To date this disease has been reported in 33 states, including Florida. General flu symptoms: malaise, fatigue, headache, chills and fever, muscle and joint pain may be present. The disease can be easily treated with antibiotics while in its first stages. Untreated, it can develop into a wide range of muscular diseases. Prevention, as with any insect bite is always the most effective weapon. Among the common sense preventive methods is to use an insect repellent. Check often for ticks—especially the hidden parts of your body. It is suggested that ticks be removed carefully with tweezers. Pull straight out. Never attempt to handle a tick with bare hands or crush it. Using a hot match will not make a tick back out. (But it may give you a nasty burn.)

There are some other bugs of summer that bear mentioning. Flies bite. Deer flies and dog flies and horse flies bite hard. Commercial repellents must be applied frequently. Again, long sleeves and pants are some protection. Avoid bright colors. Carry a bandana to shoo them away. They don't exactly attack but bite when they light.

We don't have nesting ground bees here like in the mountains but when walking barefoot watch out for the honeybees that might be hanging around on the ground. The old remedy of wet tobacco

actually does soothe the sting.

Watch where you sit and walk. Enjoy the woods and have a *buzzing* good time!

Snake Stories

Almost everyone has some sort of "snake experience" if they've lived long enough in any area that is not an asphalt jungle. Not too many of us seek out snakes but fewer of us still enjoy a having face-to-face encounter. Indeed, most snakes get a bad rap. Perhaps we are identifying with Adam or Eve and consider the serpent as an evil embodiment of Satan. I'm not of that persuasion but neither do I go out of my way to pat their cute little (sometimes) triangular heads. Suffice to say that I know they are there when I go traipsing around in the great out-of-doors. There have been unpleasantly close encounters—memorable encounters. Florida has her snakes and I have my Snake Stories…

Florida boasts two types of rattlesnakes: the shy pygmy rattler and the not-so-shy large diamond-back. My mom was pretty realistic about snakes: " If you go walking through palmettoes you will probably get bitten by a rattlesnake." She meant this sincerely and was referring to the diamondback that likes the palmetto thickets and suns itself in the animal trails of our outback and all too often the warm pavement of our back roads. My only encounter with a pygmy rattler was many years ago in Orlando when I found one laying full length against the side of a vacant house. Neither of us bit.

Not too terribly long ago I was puttering around our Boogie Ridge home when my two cats were seen doing a bit of a "dance" in a flower bed. They were charging and retreating, hissing and meowing. They had cornered against the house a full grown, very large hissing rattler in this flower bed. They were agile enough to work as a team bounding in and out and still avoid a very perturbed snake. When I saw what they were up to I called across the street to a workman building what is now Janice Carroll's home. I asked for his help. Why then was I surprised (and appalled) when he pulled out a shotgun and blew the head off *my* snake?

David was still working in Orlando and this was a Thursday. He would be back home soon and I wanted him to see *our* snake. I

carefully wrapped the carcass in a bath towel and left it on the steps. When David called to say he wouldn't be home until morning, I removed the towel and its contents to the freezer compartment of our refrigerator. The next day when David was reaching for ice cubes, he found the towel in the freezer...and that is one of my snake stories.

Another time, another place: I was hiking in the Appalachicola National Forest with another Florida Trail enthusiast. Indeed Joan Hobson and I were writing the first comprehensive all-in-one companion guide book for the Florida Trail. It was February—perhaps the only month where you didn't feel like you were "giving blood" via mosquitoes in that murky swamp. The water level was exceedingly high and we were sloshing our way through the cypress knees. It was impossible to follow the orange blazes exactly as the trail was about three feet under water. Joan was following my lead and I was intent on getting through that morass without a snorkel. I hopped over the border fence. The water was rich in tannin—the color of tea—and the footing was a tangled mess of roots. My first impression was that I was standing on a section of garden hose.

I moved my boot forward and improved my balance with the very long hiking stick I planted. Just then the "garden hose" surfaced and swam to the nearby tree trunk. It looked an awful lot like a moccasin. I pulled out my trusty camera—with flash—and took a picture of the garden hose with the big white cottony mouth that had suddenly opened wide at the flash and voiced a very loud and scary *SSSSSSSS*. Joan came up to the fence then. "What are you taking a picture of, Susan?" Yeah!

There are other stories: how I, as the last of a hiking party in North Carolina awakened a nice copperhead. Everyone else stepped gingerly over the sleeping coil. When it was my turn the coil was wide awake.

Best advice about snakes: Don't step on them and don't take their pictures. They really *are* shy critters!

On the Art Of Being Sick

Here I am, future nurse, "founder" and first president of the Sacred Heart Academy Future Nurses, stalking the corridors of Tampa General Hospital, Tampa, Florida, in 1959

It was probably pre-ordained that I become a nurse. In my growing up years there was no question about it—at least in the minds of my parents and other important relatives. I do not remember anyone asking me if that is what I wanted to do. It's not that I didn't want to become a nurse—it's just that it might have been nice to have a choice between that or a telephone operator (the job I was told I would get if I didn't go to college and become a nurse.)

The fact that folks talked about college and nursing in the same breath was a bit *avante garde* for those days. Nurses were still cranked out of hospital schools and the image was of a bedpan wielding matron—by rights a technician. Nursing had not yet reached the art form that our University of Florida dean (Dorothy Smith) envisioned. All things considered, I had no real objections to becoming a nurse and so that is what happened (since I didn't want to be a telephone operator).

My older brother Tom (fourteen years my senior) had probably been coerced into the medical profession the same way. I do not think he really had any choice in the matter. We were both probably subjects of an early form of parental "brainwashing." I am not really complaining, just commenting on "the way it probably was."

The perverse thing about all of this college talk was that ours was the first generation on either side of the family to attend college of any type. Not just that but the women of our family had not worked outside the home in any type of career path. That I would become a nurse was (as my mother so quaintly put it) "give you something to fall back on if something happened to your [*as yet unselected*] husband." That I would actually make a living from working on a day-to-day basis was simply unheard of in the Engle Family. It was an age when this philosophy was not as *outre* or outrageous as we might deem it today. Indeed when my little sister (eight years my junior) was asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?," she answered honestly (as she saw it), "I wanna be 'nuthin'—just like my mama..." Mama took that as a compliment—as well she should. Mama was jack of all trades, including nurse.

When the day of reckoning came and I was to choose a school I suggested to my parents that they send me "to the biggest school they could afford" (such was sixteen-year-old reasoning). In those days it was the University of Florida (Go Gators!) in Gainesville, Florida. Little did I know that the nursing program there was cutting-edge professional—besides that I liked the student nurse uniform! The program was led by one Dorothy Smith—a dean to be feared and cherished. Her nursing program was not "cookie cutter" technician or glorified maid service. We were not just to "do nursely things" but we had to know "why" we were doing them. We were teachers. We were the image of the modern nurse. If I had any doubts before I enrolled they were cast aside as I inched my way

along the path to a bachelor of science in nursing—a whole new horizon of nursing career.

It is because of this very strong background in nursing that I have always understood the plight of the patient. It is also the reason why, whenever there was a medical question afoot someone would nod in my direction and say: "Ask Mom" or "Ask Susan." People still do. Whether or not I deserved this trust is moot—I had it and it was sacred—and still is.

Back to Nursing? "No Way, Jose!"

April 1989

While sitting around a picnic table munching on some of Joyce Wadley's (wife of Boaz Wadley and Cedar Key neighbor) super fare and enjoying the evening breeze, a fellow retired RN said to me: "Do you think you'll ever get back into nursing?"

I was hoping that Patty was up to date on her Heimlich Maneuver since I almost choked on the chicken! I managed to gasp: "No! I'll keep up my license, do my required continuing education, read the journal and update my PDR every ten years or so—but practice? You mean like work for money? The answer is no."

What is it about the nursing profession that makes so many of us run so hard to get away from it? When is that point in time that we become disheartened with the profession?

Most of us "dropouts" are reasonably intelligent and good at what we do (or did). We readily admit that we like the work. In my case, I even liked the paperwork (and there are reams of it).

It isn't just the money. You can't put a price tag on a good nurse any more than you can a good mother. When I started, nurses were doing the things nursing assistants are doing today: bathing patients, backrubs, bedpans. It was anathema for a nurse to start an IV or blood. Times changed and I changed with them.

When I fell back into nursing in 1980, it was a field of high tech machinery and chemistry. I quickly learned to question every doctor order, double-check medications, oversee my aides with a keener eye, document everything in triplicate and keep my insurance at the max. (By this time I had my masters degree.)

Still, I liked what I was doing and the people I was working with. My patients may have been cantankerous but what sick person isn't? I got along with most of the doctors around town and they usually respected my judgment when it came to a recommendation for treatment. But I was oh so tired! Every day! All day long! I was doing Medicare recertifications in my sleep!

It's what is referred to in nursing circles as "burnout." In my case it was more like a raging forest fire.

My sabbatical lasted long enough for me to realize that I'd never master computer programming and that I was twenty years behind in pathology; I did, however, ace the course I took in the history of higher education. After all, I was there for much of it.

I took another couple of direct stabs into the nursing profession: one as Madame Director on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. My beeper was insinuating itself nicely into my Friday night dates at the Cinema Pub. The proprietor there thought it extremely strange when I would give instructions over the phone on how to do a HHH enema (high, hot and hell of a lot).

Dave didn't like it too much when I had to go out and replace an aide with my own person at midnight on a frosty morn. I was, however, offered a permanent staff position as a Nurses's Aide when the shift ended. I was flattered and introduced myself to the nurse in charge. We had a good laugh and have remained friends. That Director's job required no nursing uniforms but in my position as sales representative for the agency, I had a wardrobe of Lilli Rubins and Guccis to wear. It was pretty funny trying to piece together a traditional white uniform at midnight. Enough was enough!

I thought about nursing long and hard before I took the next job with an employee rehabilitation agency. As a nurse I would follow up accident and workers compensation cases provided by insurance companies, determine the medical needs of the client, find suitable medical treatment for the illness or injury. When the time came, the patient/client would be turned over to an employment specialist who would (ideally) get the person back to work in a suitable field. It was a very creative job all the way around. I'd worked with rehabilitation personnel and had a fairly extensive background with insurance adjusters and Medicare.

I was devoted to home care. My car was a spiffy and sporty little thing that I could have lived in. So what that I'd be on I-95

most of my week?! I became friends with the toll booth operators on the Turnpike. I soon learned the ins and outs of the orange groves around Ft. Pierce, the motels in Okeechobee. I knew which drugstores took workers compensation vouchers and the docs who didn't scream when they saw me coming.

I'd come up to Chiefland to arrange a hospital date for a client. I'd make the adjusters mad because I might recommend a very costly test. I'd make my employer mad because I would stand firm in the recommendation. I'd make myself mad because I knew I was right. I'd stand around all day at Shands (University of Florida Medical Center) waiting for a particular doctor to show up for a thirty-second conference.

I haven't worn a nursing cap since 1964. The University of Florida started its program without the traditional cap but by the time I came along three years into the program, the school had gone traditional with a cap like an inverted collar that allowed my ponytail to hang down the back. I was quite proud to wear it. I am still proud of the Gator nurses, myself included. Do I want to be a nurse? Of course! Do I want to try to make a living at it? No way, Jose!

On Childproof Caps and Other Absurdities of the Modern World

June 1989

In case you hadn't noticed or I neglected to yell at you loud enough—I bought a new car! New to me anyway. The purchase took ten years off my life in the wrong direction. Still, it was an education of sorts. As this was my first four-door car in nearly twenty years, I needed that education. The salesman told me of the safety features: "If someone should press this lever, the doors will not close. Please don't call me to tell me the door is broken." (How in heck did he know that I did that in 1972?) On that June day I wired the door shut and drove twenty miles back to the dealership just to be told it was a safety device.

I had a four-door car in my Cub Scout Den Mother years. The little darling Scouts were much more interested in my electric windows opening and shutting than our field trip to see Big Bird live and in color. That particular field trip cost me $180 not counting the

grape soda on the ceiling. There was no way I could control the horizontal and the vertical from where I sat in those days. Now this bright wizard shows me a switch that automatically locks the windows.

This child safety consciousness has gotten out of hand. A kid who drinks Old English Red Furniture Polish and thinks it is Kool-Aid has bigger problems than his taste buds. My mother once downed a quarter-cup of Clorox thinking it was pear juice—but that is another story and she wasn't a toddler. I got into a bottle of "grape juice" around Christmas one year—it was in the refrigerator—and I had a hangover until I turned eight the next September! There were no such things as "childproof caps."

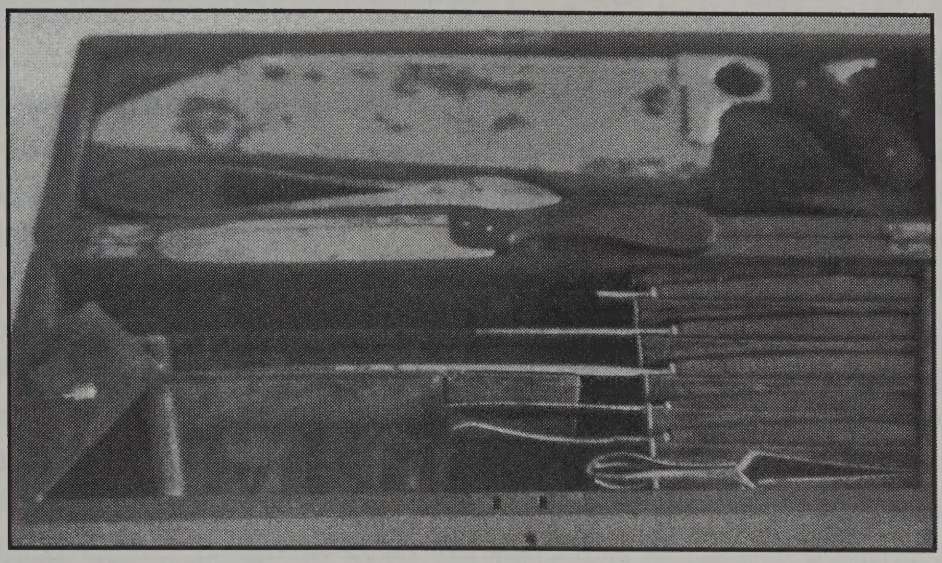
The closest we ever came to being scared about a toddler's O. D. was when Jimmy (at age 18 months) opened a sample bottle of cold medication—with *childproof* cap—and drank the whole thing. It tasted good—"Yum, yum, Mom." (Snore snore.) (Shriek shriek) Did you ever consider how ridiculous you look trying to pour coffee into an 18-month-old baby and get him to walk? That's what the doc said to do!

Now I ask you, why are we obsessed with protecting these little brutes? Of course, we love them. My mom and dad kept bi-chloride of mercury in the medicine chest in a mason jar. None of us kids would touch it—it smelled awful. I loved the taste of the senna laxative but I sure wasn't going to binge on it. There were no locks on the cupboards and no childproof caps on medicine. My mom would have throttled me or my siblings had we transgressed. Like smack! Like swat! Like, "That's pretty stupid." I learned not to be stupid.

Today when my children visit, they help me open the aspirin bottle. Fortunately, I need aspirin only when they visit. They line up the little arrow (that I can only see with reading glasses) with the little slot (that I can hardly feel through the callouses). I leave the top off.

Tomorrow might be different. I might activate those locks on the rear doors of the car. I might seal the medicine chest. I might even reverse the locks on the guest bedroom like we did with our firstborn. I'll probably sand down the tines of the forks. I'll declaw the cats and plasticize the furniture. I guess the little brutes are worth it.

An Aside About the Tools of the Trade



Amputation kit from the 1800's, complete with stains of dubious ancestry

Many years ago, when it seemed the world was new and we were new to Christmas gift giving as a family, we gave careful thought to purchases, especially the cost (a habit I like to think we haven't broken). With this in mind and the year being sometime in the 1970's, we were stuck with what to get for my (then) bachelor-medical doctor brother. My brother was a tad eccentric and enjoyed the eclectic. He was also very well traveled, having served as ship's surgeon on the S.S. Brazil and S.S. Argentina, the luxurious passenger ships of the ocean-going Moore-McCormack Lines. He had haunted the bazaars of Egypt and the flea markets of Greece himself. He had decorated his rooms with authentic hookahs and (then legal) carved ivory scrimshaw. Tommy was a trip! (Just ask any of my old boyfriends!)

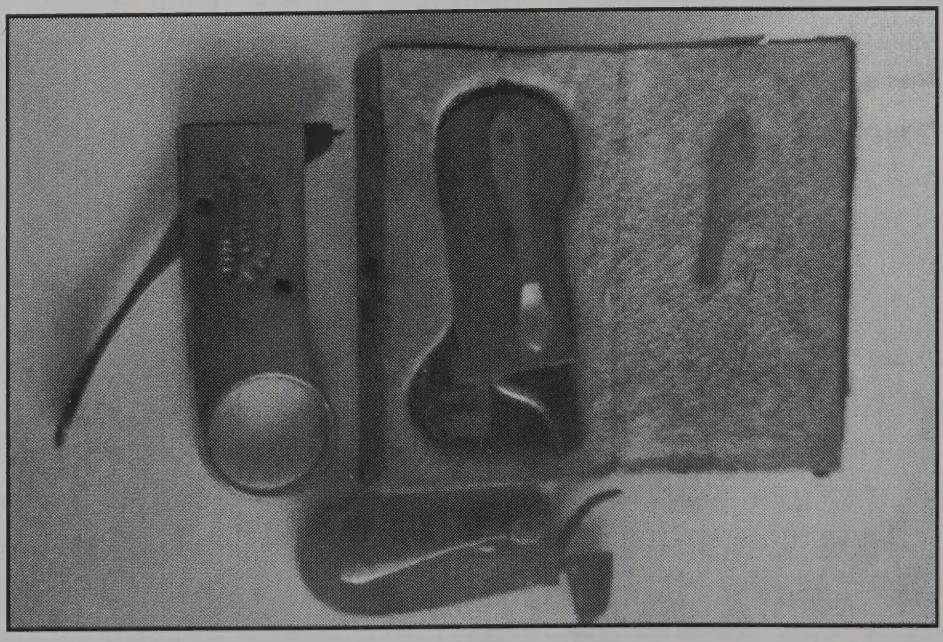
It was with absolutely no degree of hesitation then, when I happened across a classified ad in a Sunday *Orlando Sentinel* for antique medical instruments for sale, that I hopped on the telephone and then into the car—checkbook in hand. What I found for sale was "way-out wow" (and within budget). My mouth dropped open. No one is supposed to drool over instruments of torture but being in the medical profession myself I recognized these instruments as anything but play-toys and authentic. My brother would flip. I know I did.

As they would tell you on television nowadays: "Don't clean

them—don't fix anything." I didn't. I wished there would have been something nicer than a cardboard box—we did replace the purchased box with one a little more in keeping with a gift. Many of the instruments had their own velvet-lined leather boxes: surgical kits, suture sets, bone saws. Other instruments were piled loosely in tongue-in-groove mahogany boxes. There were drug kits—one from Upjohn that was still complete except for the vial that was labeled "Opium." (Not funny, that one.) Cat-gut, syringes, specula (that is more than one speculum) needles, forceps, tourniquets…

My brother didn't disappoint me—he loved his gift. He displayed the instruments in his Tampa office for quite some time. Unfortunately they became a magnet for thieves who targeted doctors' offices. Tommy reluctantly brought them to his home where they were relegated to some cubbyhole for safekeeping—not to see the light of day for years. It saddened me but I shrugged.

Then Tommy died. His widow Anna Mary asked me if there was anything of Tom's that I would especially like to have and without a second thought I asked for the medical instrument collection. So it came full circle: back into our living room—and soon to our Cedar Key living room. (Just what a living room needs: bone saws and razor-sharp scalpels!)



Spring-loaded lancets from the 1800's, a time when bleeding was still considered therapeutic. These beauties allowed the "amateur" physician, by simply pulling the trigger, to precisely nick the vein for the proper blood flow, whether or not he knew anything about anatomy.

David suggested I take good photographs of the items, with a view to having them appraised. I still think I did a good job, judging from the above photos. We located a retired doctor in Massachusetts, an "expert" on antique medical instruments, and he kindly assessed my collection and identified some of the objects that had been mysteries. While I didn't have a fortune, I had quite a collection, ranging in age from the 1820's (a very few bone handled tools), through the Civil War and into the 1880's, and ending in the early Twentieth Century. History by the handle: ivory to bone to wood to Bakelite to stainless steel. The 1960's would transform the medical instrument world—so many are now single use and disposable.

My little collection has been displayed at the Florida Museum of Natural History's Collector's Day and at the University of Florida Medical Center, and has been featured in a *Gainesville* (Florida) *Sun* newspaper article. I was proud and knew that my brother was watching

A present day comment: Today that collection is part of the University of Florida's Health Science Center Archives. It is my Legacy (as a Gator Alumna) to the University of Florida's College of Nursing and Medical School. My brother—an Emory Medical School graduate—wouldn't mind too much.

The Plight of the Patient Patient

March 1990

Much of my adult life has been spent sitting around doctors' waiting rooms. It's not that I am sickly or anything like that; it's just that I feel that when a kid runs a fever of 102 or has a bone protruding through the skin, he should be seen by a doctor. I also chose that brand of nursing that requires me to accompany my client to the doctor's appointments. I've also served my time in veterinarian's offices, but that is another story. There is a certain art to waiting room sitting. On the first visit, you check out the art work, count the stains in the carpet and let your imagination run wild as to what caused the stain. Then you get down to the serious business of magazine reading. So far this month I've studied thoroughbred breeding in Ocala, the latest acquisitions by the Smithsonian, deer

hunting in the Panhandle, and the Yellow Fever Epidemic in Tampa, 1918. I made the mistake of picking up a Woman's Day filled with gorgeous casseroles. It was 12:30 and I'd been waiting for over an hour and a half for my client to be called. I entertained everyone with the tummy rumbles.

Now, to be truthful, I wasn't particularly annoyed since I was getting paid to sit there. It did throw my entire afternoon schedule off, requiring me to return to Ocala later in the week. Still, that is my job! I thought, though, about those other people who were trying oh so hard to be patient patients. They had made 11 AM appointments in good faith. They didn't realize two other people also got 11 AM appointments!

I once knew a doctor who made appointments for 9 AM and 1 PM. It was first come, first serve, so people would start arriving at 7 AM and the doctor didn't come in until after 9. He was an excellent orthopedic surgeon but his scheduling was the pits. Jimmy had a broken leg at the time and Steven was being observed for Perthes and on crutches and a leg sling. Davy had a cast on his arm. (That doctor bought a new Mercedes that fall.) I was working back in those days and had to take off the afternoon to get the young'uns to the doctor. Long about 3 PM, I went to the desk and said: "We are going home. Call me when you're ready for us!" I should have done this to begin with! At least at home, I could work on charts.

Our opthamologist was a real treasure. He probably had the best bedside manner with little kids I've ever seen. He worked miracles in soothing Steve's fears about eye surgery when he was just four years old. He wasn't bad soothing mama's fears either. He was a wizard working on those baby eyes and fixing them. I wouldn't have traded him for the world. He, however, was an early bird and scheduled all his office patients for 7:30. Of course he had already made his rounds at the hospital. 7:30 was reasonable to him. Just try though to get two kids off to school a half-hour early and a four year old dressed and to the doctor at 7:30, knowing it will probably be 10 before you're seen.

Not all doctors are insensitive to their waiting patients. My Gainesville internist has a thriving practice and a busy waiting room. I've never had to sit more than ten minutes–hardly enough time to read a short recipe! Our dentist has a tight schedule but not only do we not wait, he calls the day before to remind us of appointments.

The psychiatrists I know are every bit as busy as their orthopedic counterparts—with hospital duty and teaching—their private patients never wait unless they are early!

Everyone understands about emergencies: on occasion I've been an emergency. Jimmy just about cut his finger off when he was a baby; Steve smashed into the side of a pool. Once, while I was waiting for a routine OB visit, a lady in the waiting room went into labor. I figured she could have my time slot. The doctor, of course, followed her to the hospital across the street. So much for that appointment!

It is just that I don't understand why, barring emergencies, the office staff can not estimate the length of an appointment time. One summer when my brother, Doctor Tom, was quite ill, I had my first experience with office nursing. Tommy had a real down-home practice. All his patients were friends and neighbors and some knew him from the time he was a child. They liked to talk and this would sometimes throw the schedule off. So, we just built in an extra few minutes for certain people.

Heck, if I take my car in for servicing, the mechanic will begin on it immediately if I have an appointment. Why, if we take our bodies in for servicing, can't the "mechanic" check our gaskets and mufflers pronto? Office Staffs, Are You Listening?

If You Think Being Sick Is Bad, Just Go to the Drug Store- You Won't Die Laughing

January 1991

My Family has been blessed with general good health and few chronic or long-term illnesses, so we've tended to neglect our education about costs of long-term medical treatment. (There have been a few notable exceptions which brought us back to reality.) The haze that surrounds filing insurance claims for prescriptions is a wonderland of Catch 22's. Couple their "Catches" with those of the Internal Revenue Service for "Deductions" and one is tempted to take up growing medicinal herbs.

Those of us in the medically allied fields are the worst when it

comes to forgetting that a patient actually has to shell out money for something that may or may not work and may or may not cause side effects that are worse than the condition itself. Still, none of us wants to go back to the days before penicillin or insulin or other life sustaining medications or treatments. We herd ourselves to pharmacies, slips of paper in hand, and pray that some patron saint of the insurance world will hear our plea to help us pay for the miracle drug or appliance. Insurance companies, despite their auspicious name, do not like people who need insurance and take advantage of their premiums. Group rates go up. Workers' Compensation rates go up. Even if you yourself don't get sick, you'll be paying for someone else's heart condition or diabetes or fall from a roof top.

This part is only the tip of the proverbial ice-berg. Recently, I had the occasion to swim under that floe and get very cold. My dad had suffered from cancer for many years and had undergone many surgeries, leaving him with an ostomy—an opening to divert waste into a pouch—rather than through normal channels. Daddy accepted this and resigned himself to learning the system. He also was frugal enough to look into supply houses for the appliance paraphernalia. He was a fastidious person and never wanted to run out of supplies and carried a small briefcase with him on his travels or even day-trips.

Neither was this ostomy business foolproof: Some systems and pouches didn't work, so he couldn't use them. Trial and error and lots of expense! Still, there really wasn't any choice! When Daddy died suddenly (of a heart attack–not cancer) at an advanced age, he left full, unopened boxes of supplies well within the expiration date. The drug houses would not take them back; the American Cancer Society was pleasant but never picked them up. I didn't know of anyone who used his ostomy system to give them to. These are not the types of items that are appropriate for a Woman's Club Tent Sale. The opened boxes were perfectly usable and I kept things like cotton swabs and skin preps for my own family's use. Thankfully, none of us needs a pouching system so I was left to throw those $22-per-box pieces of plastic to the Bronson landfill. I reckon I threw over $1,000 worth of supplies away.

Something is terrible wrong. A few years ago, in the capacity of nurse, I was called upon by a legal firm to go through a deceased client's medications. I didn't know this gentleman personally, but

David did. He bought his medications as they were prescribed. He had a heart condition and it was apparent that the doctors had changed his medication quite a few times. The profile of that medicine chest read like the Physicians Desk Reference. We commandeered (and paid for) his bottles of aspirin and Tylenol; the Sudafeds and Actifeds; the ace bandages and the gauze. But, pray tell, what could I do with the bottles of Procardia and Corgard, his Diazide, his Catapres, his other prescription drugs? Something is wrong. It's not that I believe in people taking other people's medications: on the contrary, this is absolutely wrong. What works for me may not work or be harmful to my own blood sister. It's not that I don't believe in expiration dates, for these are helpful guidelines.

Until we get a better system of doctor-pharmacist-patient relationship going we can only hope that patients will not be penalized for buying smaller quantities; that generic drugs will be stabilized; that doctors will lend a keen ear to his or her patient's needs; that honesty will be employed about expiration dates on medications. (It depends so much on how the drug is stored!)

Meanwhile we must bear it. We don't have to grin.

A present day comment: I am pleased to report that there have been some changes for the better in usage and disposal of durable medical equipment and medically related supplies as well as medications themselves. Unfortunately I had to learn about these changes the hard way: by becoming seriously ill. As for the equipment I found that the Hospice Thrift Stores (which may not have existed when the earlier articles were written) gladly take both DME ("durable medical equipment," like crutches and wheelchairs) as donations but also disposable medical supplies such as boxes of gauze, feeding tubes, bags, and as in my dad's case the urostomy pouches. We have also learned that several of the chain drugstores (CVS and Walgreens for example) have programs to return unused medications. We should also check with our local government (fire department or city hall) to see if there is an "amnesty day" when we can drop off old or unused medications. Under no circumstances is it good to flush unwanted medications down the drain. Good to know!

Money: The Making & Unmaking Thereof

"Save your seeds!" Whenever David hears someone complaining about the state of the union, the world or even the State of Florida you will hear him espousing this dictum. He refers, of course, to the frugal habit of putting away home garden seed to replant the next season—for the literal "rainy day." David not only saves what we have nurtured ourselves but following in his mother in law's footsteps picks from roadsides and (roll your eyes) unsuspecting flower beds around and about.

Born at the end of the Great Depression (1938), Dave fell heir to the habit of saving things: a habit that touched anyone of that era—and that includes me, born into a family of string savers.

Bringing the two of us together in marriage created a joint personality of money-consciousness that was not always entirely necessary. We were blest not to have to worry about spending for truly important things but tight-fisted when it came to flights of fancy. The problem has always been—for us—in telling the difference between the two.

Accustomed to Eating Regularly

February 1989

In going over the family budget recently David announced positively: "It can work *if*..."

I had a good idea what was coming so quickly slipped into a silk peignoir, put Ravel on the stereo and rapidly chilled a bottle of vintage Franzia. (This *used* to work.) The last time we had a real budgetary conference we agreed that I should stop working: it was costing us too much money. Now that was what I call a successful conference.

"Your phone bills are outrageous!"

"Uh hum, I know."

"What are all these calls to Chiefland?"

A present day comment: in 1989 Chielfland was a toll call from Cedar Key.

"Oh, you mean Beauchamp's Hardware Store?"

"OK, you can forget those. I understand."

"What about these 16 calls to Gainesville?" (The builder)

"And Bronson?" (The courthouse)

"Oh. Atlanta would be Jimmy, right?"

"Yup."

"Good Lord, here's one for thirty minutes to Zephyrhills. Who do you know in Zephyrhills?"

"My mother."

"Oh."

"And my sister."

"Oh."

"And you accepted charges from Orlando?"

"That's another of your sons."

"How many times have you talked to Joan this month?"

"Six."

"*Six*!" Now, here was a call into which he could sink his teeth.

"Yes, dear, but she called me *five* of those times."

"Anna?"

"Twice."

"Charlotte?"

"Once."

The litany went on.

The outcome was that I should get back into amateur radio as soon as possible.

Our next agenda item was gasoline and automobile maintenance.

"That's easy to fix. Just stay up here full time."

I had him on that one! No more hitting deer and mangling the grill of the Jeep. No more flat tires on a monthly basis. There would be enough gasoline left over in this country to keep a taxi fleet alive.

"What do you spend on groceries?"

"I have not the vaguest idea."

"Why not?"

"Because I figure it this way: When the money runs out I stop buying." (Besides, eating is something we'd become accustomed to doing.)

Entertainment:

"I really don't think renting two videos a week is going to send us over the top, do you?"

Clothing:

"I bought a new pair of sneakers in November, 1987. Remember?"

We were now into Phase II of the budget meeting. Time for a little Rachmaninoff.

Unfortunately, Dave found last year's medical, dental and veterinarian bills. It spoiled the mood.

"We've got to *stop* this," he proclaimed.

"I couldn't agree more," I said.

"What do you say we go and buy a peck of oysters, rent a movie, and if there is anything left over a six-pack of Carling?"

Dave was getting the idea.

Investing for "Retirement" —Susan Style

May 1993

My friend, Toni, said something the other day that bemused me: "Susan, it must be wonderful to be retired like you are and to be able to do what you want, when you want to do it." I let Toni finish the sentence before I went off into flights of fancy about retirement. First of all, I do not consider myself "retired." I never did anything long enough to retire from and when I did, I didn't even consider it work. Not that I haven't punched a couple of time clocks over the years. It annoyed me greatly that such stock was set on getting to a certain place at a certain time and having to leave when there was still work to be done. It never bothered me to eat lunch at a desk or behind a steering wheel but it sure did bother me when someone scowled at me for taking a day or so off to stay home with a sick kid or because I was feeling puny that day. It was pretty terrible being so arrogant (terrible for my bosses anyway). More than once I said, "Take This Job and Shove It" in my best and most ladylike manner. Sometimes I wasn't so ladylike. It's equally annoying today to be asked, "Don't you miss work?" It's hard enough arranging one career person's vacation time without worrying about fitting my own

schedule into the grander and greater scheme of "time off."

It has come time to consider "retirement" as defined the American way. Planning for retirement calls for a nest egg of some amount. Years ago my estate-planning-lawyer-type husband suggested I establish an IRA—which I understand is a way for me to have what I don't know I have. It's probably a good idea because I've always held that money is good for only one thing: that is negotiating for stuff that I probably don't really need anyway. The way this IRA works is that I get to choose some investment accounts that appeal to me. He was trying oh so hard to get me interested in reading financial columnist Malcolm Berko and getting reading glasses with enough magnification to follow the NYSE and AMEX. That year I bought a wad of paper from a tin mining company in Sweden. Tin was supposed to be a hot item that year! The broker that sold it to me was six feet tall, had naturally wavy dark hair and Paul Newman blue eyes and a Clint Eastwood smile. "Leo" has become a household word around here.

Not long ago, Dave was in one of his managerial moods and suggested that I might like to restructure my investments. We've long held the belief that one should buy stock in things that one uses—one of the best reasons for holding on to anything with "telephone" in the name. I lean toward cat food and calcium supplements and moleskins and rip-stop anything. Last year I'd have bought a block of Air-Splint, Inc., once I found out how much one of the little monsters cost [*another of those allusions to our Appalachian Trail adventures*].

Dave wrote away for a pile of prospectuses (prospecti?). Over lunch he said, "Pick ten." One very nice (and I could tell good-looking) gentleman called him to thank him for his interest. Dave wouldn't call him back. That wasn't fair! This poor kid was just doing what he was supposed to be doing—so of course his company went to the top of my list. Then I found out that another company served a construction firm with my maiden name. It had to be reputable! I drew on my knowledge of Greek mythology and figured another was honestly "two-faced" so I trusted them. The selection process went on with deliberation. Yesterday, I was soaking up a book by a favorite author—this man writes mystery novels that always have to do with horse racing. I know nothing about horseflesh and have been to exactly one horse race in my life. My eyes twinkled over the dust cover and I

suggested that I might want to invest in a race horse. "*Not in this lifetime*!" was the reply.

I Don't Do Money...and Other Things

January 1993

It was 9:30 AM on a gray January morning. I was doing swing-shift out of the laundry room and on temporary assignment to kitchen patrol. Those assignments are always temporary. I break too many dishes. The phone rang. The lady calling from some company's boiler room struggled with my name. I checked a laundry tag and told her how to pronounce it. She wanted to send me a credit card. I'm suggesting that she *not* send me a credit card. Talking to her was probably easier than cleaning hair balls out of the carpet, so I let her have her say. I'm now getting another credit card, "subject to approval."

If anyone approves credit for me on what I told them, then this country is in really bad shape. We know that already, don't we?

"What do you do?"

"Nothing, really." Like she wanted to know the last place I was employed. I was having difficulty remembering the last *year* I was employed!

"You really don't want to know any of this—and I really don't want your credit card. I already have one. It has a big Gator on it The last time I had a card of my very own someone stole it—in Atlanta, Georgia."

She persisted. I told her that I was a "kept-woman." When she got around to asking about my husband's income I said "*Beacoup*!" She hadn't majored in French. Good thing, I was lying anyway.

"How long have you been a housewife?" That is a very touchy subject.

"Well, let's see—how long have I been married? Thirty very-odd years." This really *was* better than giving a cat a suppository.

I knew that she was just doing her job and couldn't spend all day with me, but I was just getting warmed to the subject.

"Go ahead and send me the card—subject to approval of course. I'll be glad to help you make your day."

"I still need to have the name of your employer."

I planted my tongue firmly over my temporary fillings—waiting for crowns that will cost all the *beaucoup* and said: "*The Beacon.*"

Guess we might be able to use an extra credit card after all!

Mr. David Goes on a Shopping Spree

June 1990

For all intents and purposes, David is a frugal person. He buys dented cans of baked beans and socks from the flea market. Just look out when he is in a shopping mood. I look forward to Thursdays, because I never know what he is going to drag in. So far, I haven't had to feed any of his purchases. Within the last week he fell in love with a pressure cooker/canner that displaced the rice cooker and wok from the top of the refrigerator. The wok went on top of the microwave, which displaced the hot pot holders. He bought me a 1940's vintage Mix-Master complete with juicer attachments. This thing promised to do everything except spray paint the house. It promptly shocked the socks off him so it went into the closet to await neurosurgery. The next curious appliance had a jar at the top and a spout at the bottom. It was a Hobart Industrial Strength Something. It was sturdy, stainless-steel and heavy glass and obviously a quality thingamajig. We shook it and explored its innards. All we found was some ground brown powder. I'm braver than Dave—I tasted it. Coffee! He had purchased a coffee mill. I guess this would be lovely if I drank more than one cup of coffee a year. Perhaps I could rent it out.

Then David brings up a sealed crate. Gallon jugs of apple juice. I love apple cider. That's a good thing. The last case of fruit juice was grapefruit. I learned to love grapefruit juice. I learned to cook with grapefruit juice. I gave grapefruit juice as wedding gifts.

David's shopping sprees are a joy to behold. We were tooling down the Georgia-Florida Parkway when suddenly he does a U turn. My mother thinks he missed some sort of exit. He explains very calmly: "Your daughter needs clothes and I'm going to dress her." Frankly, I thought I was fairly well covered. When Dave wants to buy clothes, one does not argue. This went on all week. I had slacks and shoes and shirts and dresses. It reminded me of the time

we went out car shopping for a Volkswagen Rabbit and came home with an Mazda RX-7. Or when I casually mentioned I liked a particular Mercedes. That was in 1968. It still sits in our carport.

You might call me spoiled. You are right. I'd fought and fit and scratched and bit with the computer upstairs. In walked Dave with this cute little lap top job that even works on batteries so I can take it with me when I'm sitting in reception rooms for hours. It meant swiping yet another room for my paraphernalia. David is a wonder. My house is in a constant state of flux because of his purchases. But, do you know, I wouldn't have it any other way! David doesn't buy lottery tickets. He buys coffee grinders and pressure cookers. Things could be a whole lot worse.

Aw, C'mon Ross

May 1992

Long ago in the land of riches and plenty there was a man who sold automobiles for a living. Every night when he would go home he would ask his kiddies: "What do you think about this sales pitch?" They'd say, "Aw, C'mon Dad!" His name just happened to be Ross, and thus was born my mental image of the car salesman. On TV the pitchman would leap on to the hood of the closest van, beat it with his fists and slash the price tags right off the windshield in front of your disbelieving eyes. Before the thirty-second commercial was over, he was begging you to come and carry the vehicle away. (Of course, who would want it after he had jumped up and down on it for a full thirty seconds?)

These were the days before available little "blue books" that told you what a car should cost: wholesale, retail, trade-in, loan value and in pieces from a junkyard. These were the days before Ralph Nader drove his first Corvair. These were the happier times when the customer expected the odometer to be rolled back to a convenient number and checked under the hood not to count cylinders but to make sure the car had an engine. The habit of kicking tires came I'm sure from the suspicion that the wheels might be glued on with school paste.

I'd done a lot of car shopping with my dad who was something

of a wizard when it came to any thing mechanical. (His dream car was the Edsel.) Daddy was the kind of person who made his children learn about flywheels and pistons before we were allowed to open the glove compartment. Daddy always kicked the tires! Car shopping with my father has only been surpassed by car shopping with David. To do this twice in less than three years is no less than above and beyond the call of wifely duty.

The occasion that prompted this was the sale of his trusty, if aging, Jeep Cherokee: the one he purchased in pristine condition and had every gadget known to man, not to mention Levi Strauss seat cushions. Weekly commuting to Orlando, hauling boats and hay and hitting deer, took its toll on its beauty and highway worthiness.

I'd agreed that getting down to 1 1/2 vehicles (Baby—the green Mercedes sports car—and our Audi sedan) would save us enough money in insurance to allow our sons to pursue their careers as professional students, at least until they found wealthy wives.

He thought a van would be the ideal solution. It occurred to him then (after three weekends of kicking tires and sneaking looks at his xeroxed blue book pages) that he didn't want to put hay and manure into anything pretty. Besides that, vans cost too much and lets face it, the Audi has a lot of miles on it too and wouldn't get a good trade-in. Back to the pick-up truck idea.

At this point the salesmen at the regional dealerships were getting to know us on a first name basis and asking about the health of the Chinese cabbage in the garden. Some of them, I am sure remembered us from three years ago when we bought the Audi.

This is the scenario: Drive into the lot trying to look inconspicuous. Suddenly a loud speaker says something like "John, call on Line One." (We are sure there is a surveillance camera trained on the entrance to the lot where a secretary gets paid for hauling the salesmen out of the coffee room when she sees a "live one" drive in.)

"John" tucks in his shirt, tosses his ciggie, straightens his paisley tie and fixes his smile as he strides across the black top, hand outstretched. I always feel a little disappointed at this point because the guy is obviously wanting to sell you something and if it were truly up to me, I'd buy one of each just so he would be happy when he went home that night. David, however, is cool.

"Just browsing. Not ready to buy anything; just trying to get an idea of what's available..." (David, really, we have been doing this for six months of weekends! You've met every transmission in every town; and know the names of all the dealers for miles and miles around.) In private, he says to me: "It's too gussied up!" I say: "David, I like having a radio in the car." Here he gets out his checklist for the perfect car: low mileage, good condition, right type of transmission (standard 5-on-the-floor), the right model according to Consumer Reports, the right year, and of course, very cheap—driven by a little old lady who only put her boat in with it once a year and kept it on blocks between short hauls to the marina.

Then I start: I don't like bench seats and need a place to put groceries without having to have a ladder to climb into the truck bed. I don't like big tires and none of those foolish lights on top. Preferably, I like blue cars or some candy apple or cranberry red. White and champagne colors are okay.

The salesman comes back. "Would you like to drive it?" I look beseechingly at Dave: He reads my mind. "One of these days you will have to at least test drive something." (Besides, for a truck, it was pretty!)

As we alight after the test drive and I unfold myself from the rear cab seat I'm thinking: "I could live with this." I dutifully recorded the information about the vehicle into what was now beginning to look like the log of the Starship Enterprise.

"You are spoiled, do you know that?"

"I know you liked it."

Maybe it was because I patted the tires before we left and didn't kick them; or was it because I winked at the salesman and said to myself: "Weeelbeeebaaack!"

Why I Don't Like Money

May 1990

Money bothers me. It always has. I don't like to buy things and I really don't like to sell things. If I've got it and you need it, I'd sooner give it to you than figure out the sales tax. Maybe it's my Indian heritage but I'm good at bartering. Yup, you can have Manhat-

tan Island for $24 and some clam shells. (Actually I'd be getting the better of the deal with that one.) I'd never make it in retail sales. If it's pretty I'd want to keep it and if it's ugly I wouldn't want you to have it. David once told me about the *ladies* in the windows in Amsterdam. I wouldn't be good at that either. Nobody could afford me. (Ask him, he knows.)

I once belonged to a club whose sole purpose was socializing. No one was embarrassed that we had no *causes* other than meeting for lunch once in awhile. We had no speakers and did nothing at these luncheons but eat and gossip and show off our new clothes. We'd entertain the judges' wives once a year at somebody's new house. It was so very decadent and a lot of fun. It was so *matronly*. No matter that I had to scrape the Gerbers off my lapels and blow dry the diaper stains from my skirt front before going out on the circuit.

Then something happened—I got an idea. We were going to have a fashion show. Not your normal type fashion show (I haven't changed much in thirty years), but a spoof on fifty years of women's dress: *Fashion Has a Fickle Finger (1920-1970)*. Dave pulled out every record we ever owned and taped snatches of these down to the second to use as walk-ons for our models. This, darlings, was before cassettes—we used an Ampex reel-to-reel tape recorder and an old Fisher amplifier. I sat there with pink curlers in my hair and headphones at four in the morning getting that script right. Dave, fanatic that he was (and is), said, "Do it again!" My models were most unlikely—all lawyers' wives. One, an octogenarian, did a tennis scene to "Collegiate" with her partner, not much younger. Another was a GI in fatigues ("This Is the Army, Mr. Jones"). We had flappers and bobbysoxers and flower-children. It was great fun.

The problem was, we made *money*. Scads of it. The play (or whatever you call it) was used by other groups who paid us more money. No one had figured on this, least of all me. I guess they finally got rid of the money. I quit going to the meetings.

I have the greatest respect for treasurers of organizations. How they can have the patience to put up with all those zeros and decimals and keep a sharp pencil I'll never know. How they can smile while they are paying somebody else's bill is beyond me. I scream any time an envelope in the PO box has a clear window! The cartilage in my knees turns to junket and my brain to raspberry jelly at

the sight of another dunning statement from *Organic Gardening.*

Money, I must remember, is only a medium of exchange. Dirty paper for the most part. It's stuff we normally would not bring into our houses. I wouldn't sell it at a garage sale. It is, however, here to stay and fits better into a purse than does a clam shell. I guess we need it. If you get tired of storing yours, send it on. I'll find something to do with it, even though I don't like it one bit.

And, Dealing with Institutions...

January 1989

My grandpa Eddie didn't believe in banks. With all apologies to our Cedar Key bankers at Barnett Bank, Sidney (Padgett) and Betty (Cannon), neither do I.

It's not that they don't do their job efficiently and conscientiously or that I mistrust them—it's just that the same sort of terror strikes me upon entering a bank as when I went in for peridontal surgery.

This happens even when I have money in the account. I feel guilty for asking them to cash a perfectly good check and am positively humiliated when they count the pennies in the rolls and I come up one short. (I didn't do it on purpose, really!)

The fact that the bank houses all my good silver and jewelry should be comforting. It isn't. How would you feel to have to set a table with Lenox China and plastic forks? "Plan ahead," says my darling spouse. To go to the vault to retrieve a pair of earrings or a pin requires real moxie. I worry for days ahead that I won't be able to find the little red envelope with the key and dream about bank teller Angie having to drill the box open. In my imagination someone has discovered that I am related to Ma Barker and John Dillinger, both.

My Grandpa Eddie was not a Donald Trump [*Yes, I actually wrote this in 1989!]* of the world. His money was not on paper; it was in gold buried by nearby fence posts, in root cellars and in coffee tins. The paper he collected was in silver certificates and jars sealed with paraffin planted who knew where!! My grandmother was far more organized: she kept her "butter-and-egg" money in the cookie

jar over the stove. The day came that Grandpa died quite suddenly. My mom was summoned to the farm to help with "arrangements." The arrangements included digging up twenty-three acres looking for coffee tins, sealed jars and caches of gold pieces. They had certain clues: the corner of the barn where Eddie liked to sit; a favorite potato patch, the outhouse.

Grandpa Eddie Friedmann and companions

On the day of the funeral Mama recalls not being able to let the neighbors in to call in the parlor since she and Grandma were drying money on clotheslines from one end of the room to the other.

Grandma moved to Florida soon after Grandpa died. The farm was sold. Grandma lived comfortably on Social Security with my parents for the next thirty years. As grandchildren, my brothers and sister and I were given ten dollar gold pieces for birthdays, graduations and weddings. We thought everybody did this.

My grandpa didn't believe in banks. If he had, his hard-earned money might he either all used up or useable today. As it is, it is pushing up pavement on what used to be a farm in a small town in Ohio.

For me, I will continue to suffer the rigors of bank statements, computer printouts, vault key nightmares, overdrafts, and automatic

teller machines. I'll smile at my banker as I would my confessor and hope he doesn't share my fear of banks.

'Tis the Season to Shop, Shop, Shop

December 1988

Sometimes I think I was born with a missing gene. I just don't like shopping. It's not that I don't like pretty glitzy things: clothes, jewelry, Mercedes Benzes. (Send me two please by return mail.)

Little shops and garage sales excepted, I am a classic basket case before I can get the MasterCard warmed up. Upon entering a mall, my eyes glaze over, my throat becomes dry; I've forgotten my children's first names and their sizes. I invariably retreat to the relative safety of a Walden's or B. Dalton's while my companion goes about merrily fingering blouses, ties, tries on shoes or whatever it is that real shoppers find so enjoyable.

I've watched these people in awe. They look so serious about their mission. They frown and mumble. The clerks frown and mumble. When they finally emerge (and I've gotten well into *War and Peace*) clutching their treasure, I've innocently wondered what they'd found, thinking it had to be something extraordinary, such as "this wonderful pair of white socks."

If this truly is a genetic aberration, at least it has skipped the next generation. My children are all Mall People. While I would prefer spending the afternoon in the dentist's chair, they are grazing the mazes.

My problem, as I see it, is that I usually know what I want to buy before I go to the store. Did you ever try to find a plain cotton blouse in one of those boutiques or department stores? One without silver threads or sequins; one with real buttons, not zippers, frogs, snaps or fringe? A pair of slacks that wasn't acid washed, cuffed, pegged or riveted?

I can remember the days when buying a pair of jeans was relatively simple. There were three brands and the sizes were for men so you knew they weren't going to fit right to begin with. So you bought the nearest size that would go over your hips, rolled up the

legs and let the waist fall where it may. Nothing has really changed except the price tag and the labels. The jeans soon enough got acid washed or bleached at home and the patches came from Woolworth's in good time.

Shopkeepers are quite concerned about shoplifters these days. I can't imagine much that I would want to wear, much less steal, and get slightly amused at those electronic gadgets that are hooked onto garments. Recently, a friend got too near an open door with a garment and the screeching alarm brought mall police to the scene of the crime. My friend had been in the retail department store business for twenty years and should have known better than to fool around with hi-tech merchandising!

In fairness, I will have to say that I do have a favorite shop that I visit once in a while. I can take forty-five garments into the dressing room and stay for hours. They let me pad about in my stocking feet looking for a belt or a purse to match a blouse. We catch up on gossip, drink coffee and sometimes order out for lunch if I am there long enough. No, I will not tell you the name of the store or where it is, since they might then turn it into a mall and lose their best customer.

David recently sent me out into Mall-World to buy him a tie. (In twenty-five years of marriage, this is a first.) He had to be desperate for a maroon tie (our sons had scarfed both of them on the last visit) and I had the car that day. My duty was clear: Get him a respectable maroon tie with little thingamajigs on it. Sure! I tried two outlying shopping centers that used to house men's stores. They'd moved to the mall. I tried Albertsons (a grocery chain of days past). I knew what I had to do: Go to the mall, by myself. I considered calling 9-1-1 to stand by. Once inside the store I found my way to the men's department past the feathered peignoirs reminiscent of Pola Negri and the teen shop that was a scene out of *West Side Story*.

Once at my destination I conjured up images of Dave wearing three-inch-wide sequined suspenders or some of those unmentionable unmentionables so openly displayed in day-glo orange. You must remember that I am not an imaginative shopper but I wondered who could have designed these displays in good conscience—forget taste.

I found the ties. Racks and racks of ties! I didn't look at prices,

just color. For once, I knew exactly what he wanted and would have purchased it at Christie's Auction block if I could find it.

I would have, at that moment, killed for a maroon tie with thingamajigs on it. *There it was*! There was only one of it. I lurched, grabbed, spun around and headed for the cashier, prize in hand. The cashier even gave me a box to put it in. (Have I judged these people too harshly?)

I found my way out of the store and began the search for my car. A gentleman asked me if I was lost. "No sir, I've just been shopping."

I Like Yard Sales Too!

August 1989

If anyone looked at my cupboard they would wonder when or how the truck ran through the house. We buy dented cans. After removing and eating the contents of the soups and apple-sauces, the cans are even more dented, so who cares? It's something like garage sale shopping. You never know what you're going to find. I bought some grape leaves with the intention of making some dolmalthes: a pretty tasty Greek canape. I used one jar and it was really good. The second jar has been gathering dust for a couple of years.

I have exotic peppers, rare spices, and pasta of every description. The boxes look like destruction but the contents are edible. Once, we bought a crate of juice destined for the Arab market. It had fallen off a truck on I-95 on the way to the Miami airport. We drank Saudi juice from Orlando for a month!

These salvage grocery stores are fun. They toss in things that no body in their right mind would carry on a regular shelf: let's suggest five gallons of champagne vinegar, for example. Dave bought it! (and we haven't seen it again since!) It's pretty apparent that cat and dog food, soups and pork and beans get dented more often than do asparagus spears. Do you think it is discrimination?

The best time we had was when we bought a full box of unlabeled canned goods—for five dollars. I had to guess whether it was people-tuna or cat-tuna! I'd suggest beans for dinner and we'd get peas. My lunch was always a surprise! If you want to be sure about your dinner, check with the Market. John will cut your meat to

order and the cans on the shelves will be readable and the aisles immaculate.

"You gets what you pays for," somebody said. I'll continue to be a regular at the Market here in town, but for the life of me I can't break the habit of going to the salvage stores.

A present day comment: The heyday of Dent N' Bent Stores has come and gone although flea markets hang on and sometimes play landlord to one. When I happen across a shelf of those nearly cast-offs I smile that secret smile of mine; punch David in the ribs and say something like "What did we ever do with that other jar of grape leaves?" You know the one I mean...

The Art of the Deal—1970

Trash And Treasure —a National Pastime

March 1989

Garage sales have become a national pastime, social entertainment and the quest for treasure. It was not always so.

There used to be something embarrassing about buying someone's cast-offs; utterly disgraceful to admit it. It says a lot about our society to learn that nowadays people hire drivers to take them on the garage-sale rounds. More often than not, Mercedes are parked right there on the shoulder of the road with the pickup trucks and vans.

I like to take some of the credit for influencing this social change. Once again, my sorority was raising money for something or other (weren't we always?) and decided to have what was then called a "White Elephant" sale in someone's (guess whose) garage and patio.

These were the days when residential sales were uncommon and considered *outre* in respectable neighborhoods. It was, however, for a good cause (I convinced Dave) and he allowed one non-threatening sign in the front yard.

It wasn't so much that I minded being repository for all this junk—it was just that I could hear the neighbors whispering: "Well, there goes the neighborhood!" Indeed, Dave and I had discovered estate sales and auctions much earlier. We haunted second-hand stores and the Webster, Florida Flea Market.

Those were the days of the *real bargains*—that is, if you had the money to buy anything at all. I'll never forget the solid rosewood piano, with real ivories and ebonies, for $300. Garage sale-ing had not yet become a science. No books were written yet on the art of haggling or merchandising in a backyard or patio.

Latter Day Sales have evolved into brokerages and block parties. They have taken on the character of recycling centers. It's pretty funny to wind up buying back something you sold at a garage sale the year before. What was simply "old" last year is now "antique."

Unfortunately, residents of new subdivisions have mostly new stuff and haven't forgotten what they paid for the item last Christmas. They are under the mistaken impression that the exercise bike

(still in the carton) that they paid $500 for (and are probably still paying for) should be worth $499.

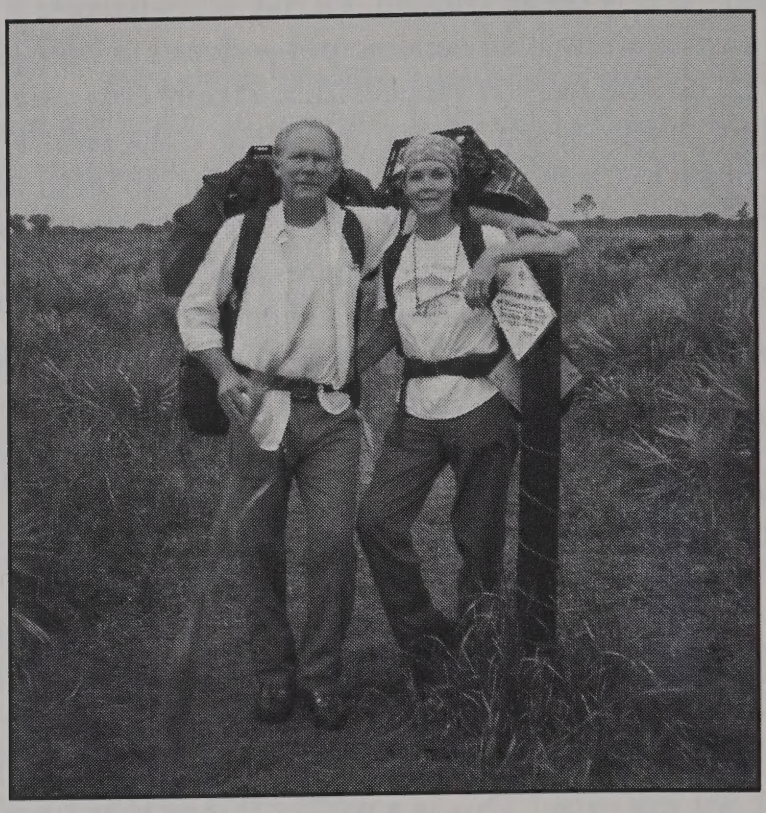
They don't understand the logic or philosophy of the die-hard garage saler: "If it is cheap enough, I'll buy it" (whatever it is). Thus, I came to own a pretty blue ceramic pot—closed at both ends. Who or what it is, no one has the vaguest idea. It only cost a dime. Thus I came to buy twenty-seven pieces (including eight dinner plates) of my best English China—in my pattern—for $5 (and have been hauling the excess around for fifteen years). I've got "Depression Glass" that reminds me of the Depression-era dishes I grew up with. These were in a box labeled "Kitchen Junk."

Once in Alaska, I passed up a thermometer that had broken at minus-25 degrees. It still registered the upper end, however. I craved that thing; wanted to hang it outside my back door to warn people about Florida winters!

The best old-fashioned garage sale we've been to in a long time was right here in Cedar Key. I couldn't see anything in the "For Sale" pile that I could not live without except perhaps the vacuum cleaner Anna Rae had just purchased. Friend Chuck then set us loose on the trash pile. Dave found himself a humdinger of a drill (only needs this and that) and a saw (with a perfectly good motor).

But, I got the prize! This is a wicker thingy that I suppose was once a lampshade. Turned upside down it looks like a wicker ciborium, three feet in diameter. "I could plant ferns in it," I said, as Dave shook his head in dismay. He plopped the thing down over my head. "This is better yet! Don't say I never buy you anything."

Go Take a Hike



Myakka River State Park, Sarasota, Florida—1992

The Appalachian Trail—the AT—the "No Rain, No Pain, No Maine" footpath wandering along the crest of the Appalachian Mountain Range from North Georgia to the wilderness of central Maine—became our second home during much of the 1990's as we walked over 2,000 miles from Georgia to Maine a couple of times. We became as comfortable in mind there as we already were in the wilds of Florida. Briefly mentioned in this book and in *Water Under the Number 4 Bridge,* the *full* story of our Appalachian Trail adventures awaits telling in the next book, tentatively titled *A Little Trail Romance.*

Not wanting you to think that Dave and I are a one-trail couple—and unable to resist the opportunity to proselytize—let me tout the joy of the hike—and especially a little of what our home state of Florida has to offer.

Yes, Virginia, There Is A Florida Trail!

December 1992

Nobody really wants to believe it, but Florida is not flat. Neither is it all sand dune and sea oats. Why is it that when someone conjures up the image of the Florida woods there's always a 'gator lurking on the edge of a swamp or a madonna-in-cheesecake pose lolling under a palm tree? Well, folks, it just ain't that way!

Just as different as South Florida is to the Panhandle, the Florida Trail traverses the state over grassy glades, over streams, through dense woods and sand dunes, into hills. It's pretty country and rough country, and worth seeing first hand. I will admit that we have no six-thousand-foot peaks or glacial ridges. We've got some pretty interesting gopher holes and air plants if you care to look. There's a world of mycology, fungi, out there.

The neat thing about any trail association is that you don't really have to go it alone. Hiking is always a solitary affair but at

least someone has blazed a trail to follow, mowed down the more obvious obstacles to help keep you from traveling in circles. The Florida Trail allows you to get lost with the best of hikers.

Now that we have "paid our dues" hiking on the revered Appalachian Trail, I've been asked questions about hiking, and since I am still learning, welcome the questions and dream up answers. Sometimes I make up whole stories. More and more I am relying on what really happens or has happened. Truth *is* stranger than fiction!

What about wild animals? My usual answer is, "What *about* wild animals?" The last poisonous snake I encountered was in my own front yard here in Cedar Key. The skin is at the *Beacon* office. In six months of roaming the Appalachian Trail, I saw several copperheads, all happily swimming away from our water source—and the ugliest rattlesnake ever in New Jersey of all places. We met a moose on a US highway, a skunk and lots of mice in the trail shelters, and deer everywhere. We were especially careful not to disturb the skunk. The peskiest "wild" animals were the horses in Virginia who insisted on stealing cooking utensils. Some dogs collected ticks and we were careful when we slept with dogs.

How about bathing? "How *about* bathing?!" I'm not one to foul a stream so I personally didn't. Besides, it was always too cold. I took my clothes off once next to a stream to bathe my swollen ankles in ice water. We found motels often enough to keep us smelling civilized—motels with names such as "Rendevouz." Dave and I always felt like a back-street romance when we'd come down from the hills to one of these places, but what the heck, we *were* a back-street romance!

Did you hitchhike? Yes. I'm an old hippie and I don't know what to say. I'd roll down the gaiter to below mud level under the knee and eventually someone would stop for us. Dave would come out from behind the bushes. *This is a lie.* He was actually better at hitching rides than I was. I was in charge of praying after we got into the truck bed, sans tailgate, to keep us from falling out. Once I yelled, "If our children could only see us now!" Our children are proper young people at home spending their inheritance while we were out playing in the mud.

How did you get food? I'd like to say we stole it but that is not the case. For our first Appalachian Trail journey we organized care packages to be sent to us at intervals. This worked pretty well except that we were always about ten days behind schedule—but only once

did the postmaster send the box back. We decided that our next time out there is no need to send Lipton Noodle dinners ahead since they seem to be universal. If we go into a town that has a post office, they will have some sort of a store. Great thinking, Susan! (Well, I didn't know this before!) We actually buried a cache of food in Georgia for a long haul. It was still there when we arrived—and we had entirety too much food! It was fun unearthing the tin even though it meant we had to stay at a crossroads litter dump that night since the can was too heavy to carry far.

How did you treat your water? I treated my water with a slurp. We were probably the only people on the trail who simply put drops of iodine into the water. We didn't engage in the mystic ritual of the filter-pump. We did and do consider these things to be more of a bother than a boon. I filtered out the debris easily enough through my front teeth or a bandana. Of all the people that we met, we were among those who never ever had a bellyache. Our water sources were springs and streams. Sometimes Dave had to walk a mile or so to get a bagful. We were careful with water and I learned to wash dishes with a damp rag. We were careful to keep the germs in the family. No one shared our dishes or our water bottles.

Did we get into towns often? One of the mysteries of long distance hiking for us was that we never really knew where we were in relation to cities. The trail actually goes through the middle of a few towns, down their main streets. Others require hitchhiking off-trail or slogging down a highway on foot, which ranks right up there with dentist appointments for things I'd rather not do.

Were the people in towns nice to hikers? You bet! As bad as we looked, we spent gobs of money. The only truly mean person we met in over a thousand miles was that postmaster in Linden, Virginia, who sent our food package back to Florida. He holds a record for spitefulness. Other people opened their homes and their barns and their pickup trucks to us.

We didn't expect the same kind of trail atmosphere in Florida. In the first place, the trail itself is in its infancy. It's not even connected end-to-end yet and most Floridians don't even know it exists. About 800 of the proposed 1,300 miles are completed. Public lands are utilized where possible and agreements with private landowners will make the trail continuous. In addition to the continuous trail, the Florida Trail Association has developed loop trails within state parks that offer the more casual or weekend hiker a way to

hike without worrying about shuttle service.

We met trail maintenance people on the Appalachian Trail. If you think mowing your back yard is a chore, try hauling a bush-hog up the side of a mountain sometime! Never was there a more saintly person than the one who went before us clearing the trail of stinging nettles! These are ornery little bushes that reach out and grab you at knee level and itch like a thousand fire ants. Trail maintenance people are the ones with the paint brushes blazing the trail so you know where you are supposed to be going. They are the ones who shore up those footpaths on the sides of the cliffs, making them at least as wide as your boot. They are the ones who clear out the big blow downs and build those bog-log bridges. They don't get paid in money. They are alternately cursed and praised and usually just taken for granted.

When I was a very small child I'd say, "Daddy, let's go down *that* road!" I wanted to see what was back there behind the pines. Sometimes he would humor me and drive as far as the car would go or until a fence stopped us. But this was an infrequent treat. It seemed like we were always going someplace and had to get there on time. What a shame!

Today I have my very own Florida Trail. It's not mountainous. (It took me a month before I realized that the reason the Appalachian Trail was so hilly was because it followed the spine of the Appalachian mountain range—a little slow with the gray cells.) The Florida Trail takes me into the deepest recesses of the Big Cypress Swamp. I can see first why this natural water recharge area is critical to life: not just the life of the 'gators and egrets but to all those people who choose to live in South Florida cities. I can climb a hill or two in Torreya State Park near Tallahassee or follow the dikes around Lake Okeechobee. I can tramp through the Ocala National Forest. I can get back behind those pine trees and see what is there beyond the billboards and barbed wire. What I find is Florida at its best..

Hiking and backpacking is not for everyone. It is, however, more a matter of mind than of physique. It has very little to do with age or even health status. We were amazed to meet on the Appalachian Trail a gentleman in his seventies in the snows of May who was told to exercise after his quadruple bypass surgery the previous autumn. He chose to do a mountain a day. He said he had a girlfriend in Florida and he was going to ask her to marry him. If she didn't say yes, he was going back and finish the Trail. Another fellow hiker, "Johnny O", turned seventy-eight on the Appalachian

Trail and was hiking to his sixtieth high school reunion in New Jersey. Two sweet grandmotherly types finished the Appalachian Trail the day before we came down from Mount Katahdin. One had spent the night up there (against all rules) because she didn't "feel so good."

Still, this hiking business is not for everyone. It's solitary even if you are traveling with your best friend and lover.

If you've got a hankering for the woods but just cannot call yourself a hunter, you'd probably enjoy the Florida Trail. The headquarters are just down the road in Gainesville. They'll give you lots of advice and help. If you are scared, welcome to the club—I'm scared of everything from log bridges to bumblebees. I especially dislike breaking legs and will avoid that activity in the future.

Experience Florida. Give Florida to your children as a gift this holiday season. Make your day very special. Happy Hiking!

More Of The Real Florida (Her Mountains!)

Mountains in Florida? Surely I jest. It all depends on your perspective and definition of "mountains." More appropriately, it should be called "mountainous terrain." The elevation isn't startling and an automobile won't go into vapor lock getting there. In fact, your car won't get there at all. Neither will your bike or ATV. A mule might if it is a very sure-footed mule. Wise mules wouldn't take on the eight-mile loop trail at Torreya State Park in the Panhandle of Florida.

Situated on the high bluffs along the Appalachicola River in Northwest Florida, this park is reminiscent of North Georgia or the North Carolina Appalachians. It simply has no business being in Florida! Dense hardwood forests of oak, pine, yew, and a rare Torreya tree (threatened with extinction) mat the forest floor with their thick leaves, cones and branches. Over a hundred species of colorful birds inhabit the area, as well as some more northern animals: the fox squirrel, beaver, gray fox, and some unusual species such as Barbour's map turtle. Florida deer and bobcat are usual residents.

Why do I refer to this area as mountainous when the elevation may not be even equal to the rolling hills of Gainesville or Tallahassee? Because it *is*, that is why!

The hiker can expect to encounter steep bluffs which rise one-hundred-fifty feet over the Appalachicola River and one, Logan's Bluff, that rises over three hundred feet. The trail is steep up and down with rare respite of even terrain through welcome meadow. It is a beautifully maintained trail (no bushwhacking required) but strenuous and scenic enough to keep the most jaded outlander satisfied. "Foot jumbies" (that wonderfully descriptive Caribbean term) describes the trail perfectly. Erosion has caused tree roots to be exposed, only to be hidden by the thick leaf mat. These jumbies reach out and grab the feet of hikers without mercy.

Forests in the park include the river swamp, hardwood hammocks and high pine land. During the years of the Civil Conservation Corps the area was heavily timbered. Remnants of this era, along with the efforts to build bridges and revetments, remain. Fire-scarred peaks of tall pine are eerie reminders of the conflagrations of yesteryear. The hiker walks through these with a sense of awe, for in this area are the red sandstone bluffs carved with the initials of other visitors. Other than this graffiti, the Torreya State Park is virtually pristine. Imagine eight miles and seeing only two cans and one styrofoam cup!

The creeks from the Appalachicola are equally clear of debris. Being one of the world's clumsiest stream-forders, I determined to get my feet wet as there were no man-made bridges to cross. The river was low and I only did this once. My feet were now wet as the rest of me, since climbing uphill produces a bodacious sweat in the unlikeliest of places. Do earlobes really have sweat glands? My bandana—tied Willie Nelson style—kept my eyes free of water that poured from my forehead.

We looked for the rare Florida yew tree, the largest big leaf magnolia in the United States, dogwood now berrying, and the gopherwood ("stinking cedar") from which Noah was supposed to have constructed his ark. We didn't have a prayer of identifying the yellow jasmine and azalea in December because we were more intent on the exercise of the body than sightseeing this day.

Dave and I did stop several times: once, for lunch at the primitive campground atop Rock Bluff overlooking the meandering wide river. Historically, the Appalachicola was a highway to the south and featured strongly in the defenses of the Confederate western campaign. From this vantage point it is easy to see why. The Appalachicola carries

more water than any other river in Florida. It was plied with steamboats pre- and post-Civil War and was lined with now historic plantation homes.

We ate our bagels and cheese and apple and (I forgot to add the sugar) Kool-Aid. It was a sweet moment, and it was all ours. There's nothing like really pungent Kool-Aid to make you want to hit the road again! I asked innocently: "Why, if our next repose is supposed to be a creek, are we climbing?" Over the years we've discovered that it is one of the malevolences of trail makers to create switchbacks for the pure fun of it. We are carrying only day-packs so it doesn't really matter that I'm grappling with tree roots for hand-holds, but it worries me that someone else might be coming into this site with a house on his/her back.

After descending again through rich land, we were once back into a tropical paradise. Rappis palms grew wild as if in some jungle. Trickling and gurgling streams were crossed time after time.

Upon entering the park earlier in the day, Dave had been disappointed that we hadn't known about the primitive campsites. We set up in the regular campground as directed by a standard notice: "Campers select sites and fees will be collected later at site." We were happy with our place. It was clean, wooded, private and on the water. We were virtually alone, but this was not enough. When Dave wants primitive, he wants primitive. I nursed him through his dejection, but he had to see both sites. (We hadn't brought the serious packs with us.) By mile six I was content to allow him to do the side trail (only a few hundred yards) to inspect the second primitive camp site. I was busy eating jelly beans and watching a yellow jacket inspect our day packs when he returned.

We came out at the wonderful Gregory Plantation house near the end of the loop, but not before getting into some real history. Confederate gun emplacements for the defense of the Appalachicola are still prominent and marked along the trail—six of them. Trees have grown up between the cannonade and the river today but the vibes of the setting are still quite real.

We knew we were getting back into civilization when neat stairsteps of pressure-treated modern wood were built into the always sloping ground.

"Susie, you will like this" I did. The plantation house itself was transplanted from the other side of the river but retains its modest

splendor with a broad green back lawn overlooking the wide wide river. We had every intention of returning to the house by car later for a guided tour. Alas, by the time we made it back to the campsite, a shower and cold drink was more inviting. That evening, while we were preparing our gourmet meal over the backpack stove and had purloined enough wood from neighboring sites to build a cozy fire, we marveled that this could be Florida. We marveled, too, that except for the attending ranger, we could be the only people in the park on a weekend.

Torreya State Park is twelve miles north of Bristol in the Florida Panhandle. Both regular and very primitive camping sites are available. Covered picnic shelters are provided as are spic 'n span restroom facilities. Guided tours of the Gregory House are available daily and include in these tours are stories of early plantation life along the Appalachicola River.

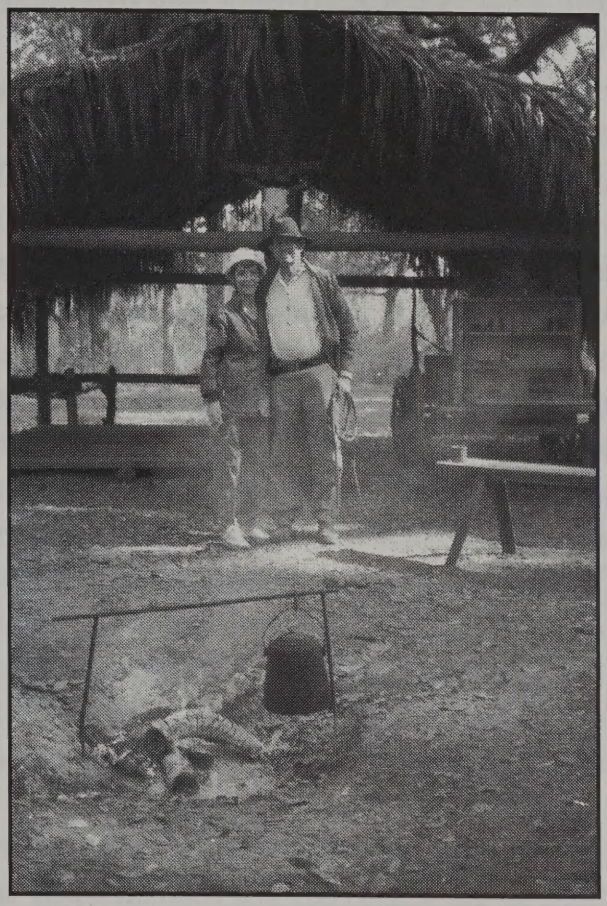
The Florida State Park System is a bit different from that of other states: the philosophy not to compete with the resort type facilities of commercial industry. At Torreya one finds this in harmony with nature: accessible, yet aloof; unspoiled, but within reach; touched, but untainted.

Don't Let Your Girls Grow Up To Be Cowboys...

When you were a little kid did you ever dream about being a cowboy? I did, until my dad told me I'd have to be a cow-*girl.* Somehow, that took all of the romance out of it for me. (Heck, while the guys were out driving cattle, I'd probably be washing pots!) That aside, did you ever think of being a cowboy in *Florida*? Instead of purple mountains' majesty and amber waves of grain you'd see yet another stand of pine and palmetto, boggy lakes and gators. (No, neither did I.)

It just so happened (and is still happening) that Florida is the second largest cattle producing state in the United States just behind Texas. For the moment, let's forget about the price of beef at The Market. Let's *steer* our thoughts to the Florida cowpuncher of yesterday. Dave and I are always looking for cheap entertainment and this particular weekend morning found us hiking back into civilization

from a primitive campsite near Lake Kissimmee. Dave was grizzled and I was sooty (I make a mean campfire), so when we saw the sign that said "Cow-Camp," we were already part of the scenario.



Cow-Camp, Kissimmee State Park, Kissimmee, Florida—1992

We stepped back into the Florida of 1876. We were offered a cup of coffee by an equally grizzled old coot and I, who prefer tea from a porcelain pot, couldn't refuse. "Guaranteed to make your chest hairs stand up and salute!" (Just what I needed that morning!) "Do you folks want to see the cows or just sit here and jaw? It don't matter much to me." (Not exactly your usual Park Ranger spiel.)

We were having trouble with our "time machine" and told the feller that we'd met Patrick Smith, the author who had written about this area and cattle driving across Florida (and a past guest speaker of the Cedar Key Friends of the Library).

"He ain't been borned yet. Guess he will be, though."

We were given our come-uppance and tried to stay in 1876.

The steers (and cows and bulls—there *is* a difference) here were penned. It wasn't always so. The cattle were free-ranging all over Florida. Fences were for *people*, not cows.

"Where did the cows come from?"

"Spain. They was wild."

These animals ate everything and the hardiest survived: lanky scrawny lean animals.

"Before 'the War'" (and *Gone With The Wind*), "a man named Jacob Summerlin" (Summerlin Avenue, Orlando, Florida for you geography buffs) "reckoned he'd round up the critters, get 'em fat and send 'em to market." He made it sound so simple. Mr. Summerlin did exactly that.

It didn't sound all that romantic any more. Tracking some cow or bull down in the hammocks or prairies of south-central Florida; lopping off an ear and branding him or her. They would then let the cattle range and breed. It was an all-year-round operation: none of these Dodge-City-type once-a-year drives of Hollywood's vision. In fact, this ranger's explanation of the process would have made younger ladies blush. They'd cull out the "barren heifers" and fatten them for market. They'd "cut" some of the bulls for the same purpose—"Cut bulls get fat quick." (Is this Sunday morning conversation or what?)

One such steer must have known what we were talking about because he decided to get annoyed. We moved away from the fence.

"That there steer can jump this fence and put us away in a hurry." (That there steer had horns longer than a '56 Caddy's fins.)

Investigative reporter I am not, but I couldn't help but ask a few questions: "Where did you get people to want to do this type of work?" (Oh, how I wished he had been chewing tobacco—the obnoxious tiny dribble from the corner of his mouth and the occasional spit—but I am sure it is against Park Service rules.) And then I "stuck my foot into it," asking: "Where were the women when all this was going on in this remote wilderness?"

"Girl" (surely this was part of his act), he said, "Women ain't good for nuthin' so the men they was standin' in line for work. The guvmint paid people to come to Florida afore the war. They gave 'em land to settle these parts. Mr. Summerlin gave 'em jobs. The women—they was to stay home and have babies—lots of 'em."

He thought he was going to rile me into an 1876 joust about

women's rights *a la* 1992 but I didn't spring for the bait. I might have except that I knew that he was historically accurate. Rather, I smiled sweetly and thought that perhaps in two hundred years little will have changed: men still won't be able to have babies.

We kept slipping in and out of our *roles*. This particular park ranger had indeed been one of many children. His own *real* father died when he was 13. He told us of his mother who walked to the nearest doctor in labor with him; of growing up in Mulberry, Florida.

He told me that if I'd a hankering, they'd put me in an old skirt and chemise and let me tell lies to the tourists like he did. They always like a young gal hanging around the cow town.

We were thoroughly enjoying our visit (especially the part about when he called me a "young gal") when we heard what sounded like an entire Brownie troop heading down the path into the past.

"You gonna fix him some grits and eggs now for breakfast?"

"Probably not. I think he is going to get peanut butter and bagels!"

Compromise for 1992: A Big Mac! (Dave, where do you think this beef came from?)

A Few Little Rants & Rambles

Contrary to what many people want to believe, I do not enjoy complaining. Most of life's little foibles don't annoy me too much. I do blow some hot air at David from time to time and a few rants even made their way into print in my columns over the years. Horrors! Let us balance that scene out with some perfect puffery: my love of Old Movies and the Sunday Funnies. That just about evens things out.

Baby Goats, Children and Young'ns... What's in a Name?

August 1991

Some people object to calling kids "kids." They claim it is "disrespectful to young people" and that "they are not baby goats." It has always been obvious to me that children were not baby goats, although I have known some that acted and smelled like them and that the term "kids" was one of endearment, informality and pleasantry. "Children" on the other hand conjures up images of stern-faced nannies and school marms wearing high collars directing a group of Fauntleroys. Technically, however, "children" is proper. Oho! Some folks think to refer to offspring in their majority as "children" (even though they happen to be your children) as demeaning. When do, for example, my children outgrow being "children"? That is like my outgrowing being their mother (and, no matter how hard I've tried, it can't be done).

Some legal systems refer to anyone of minor age as an "infant." We wouldn't be caught dead calling our college age sons "infants," would we? That is proper, too. (It might, however, be the answer to the question of how to outgrow being their mother!)

The whole idea of using language is to communicate thoughts

and feelings and ideas. To *speak* the language is more than knowing the words. This implies that the words mean the same thing to both parties.

Let's do a for-example using the word "kid." If a "kid" is a baby goat, are we implying that this young animal is being made the subject of a jest, as "I am just kidding you?" If so, we are insulting the goat, a noble animal in its own right. We might carry this analogy one step further and say that "He was made a goat of...," which implies being made a fool—another insult to the goat with four legs. Are goats foolish? Sometimes, but then so are the human "kids" of any age.

Words then are fun things to play with. They can also be dynamite. One such story I've heard (and it is unsubstantiated as far as I know) was about the final minutes before the invasion of Pearl Harbor. Representatives of our government had (reportedly) made a plea for the Japanese to "negotiate." "Negotiate" was translated "Surrender" (and that made them mad).

Closer to home and much more recently I'd made an acquaintance with a young lady who was in severe emotional and physical pain. She began weeping and I put her head on my shoulder and said, "It's okay to cry, Sweet Pea." In my family "Sweet Pea" was akin to "Honey" or some such familiarity. She bristled and it was days later that she accused me of calling her a crybaby (no doubt after Popeye's crawling terror, Swee' Pea). I was guilty of not knowing my audience. What I had meant to say to soothe her, made her feel worse.

Does anyone take offense at calling their children "little lambs?" (Maybe mama sheep.) Or "kitten?" Why get upset with the word "kids?" We are, after all, all God's "Children" and what's in a name anyway?

This Business of Time Can Be Silly

January 1989

Did it ever occur to you how difficult it is to figure out what time it is anymore? Just about the time you have adjusted your internal body rhythm to one set of initials, somebody has gone and changed it on you?

I have to wait until I'm almost ready to go to bed to call my brother in Utah and Lord help me if I had relatives that were prone to call me from Europe!

Now they've gone and messed up my holidays. I do not understand the rationale that says if Christmas is on Sunday then it is automatically celebrated on Monday. (Or is that the preceding Friday? Did Mrs. Washington and Mrs. Lincoln have anything to say about George's and Abe's birthdays always being on a Monday?

Who invented school hours? If most businesses are open nine to five, why are schools perverse enough to make their hours eight to three? I addressed this question in graduate school with the Dean of the College of Education. He didn't know either.

This whole business of time is silly. I once had a sundial (that is, until one of the kids knocked it into the lake) and it was far more reliable than any of the Hamiltons, Timexes, and Seikos I've met. I do not wear a wristwatch, nor for that matter do I wear a sundial. If I can't tell it's daytime when my eyes open, then there are bigger problems than I want to acknowledge.

Did you ever notice that the most schedule-conscious people are usually the most derelict in keeping to a schedule? When was the last time you called your doctor for an appointment and you were given "eleven-ish" as a time? You schedule the plumber for Monday—he never tells you which Monday, does he?

We have bus schedules to get to jobs and school on time from houses with all clocks out of synch. One of my children is so hyped on time that he would call "Time and Temperature" every morning to see if it was time to get out of bed.

Myself once raced to the hospital for a class to start at 7 AM, only to find the evening shift still on duty. It was 7 PM! I was only twelve hours early.

Good friends recently came to our house for a party a day early. I understand those kinds of people!

I think that we need to have a national No-Time Day—unplug the monsters for twenty-four hours. Put the wristwatches in the trash compactor. Have a sign on the door that says: : "We open around lunch time." Teachers could say to kids: "We'll be here sometime in the morning if you are interested in coming."

Churches could ring a bell when the minister or priest wakes up and we could figure approximately when services would be from that

time. No one would be uptight in airport lobbies because the planes would take off and land when there was space available; we'd know it and be more patient. We wouldn't get mad at doctors, lawyers, plumbers, waitresses, shopkeepers, teachers.

The thief of our soul is time. Let's eat when we are hungry, not because it is noon. Let's take a bath at 2 PM if we are dirty. Let's read in bed at 10 AM. Let's paint pictures at midnight by candlelight. Let's go on vacations when we are twenty-five. Let's work when we are most productive, whatever "time" that might be. Don't look for the clock to tell you.

Signs, Signs, Signs

February 1989

A few years ago there was a popular song with lyrics that went something like: "Signs, Signs, Messin' Up The Scenery, Breakin' My Mind...Do This, Don't Do That; Can't You Read The Signs?" If I'd written it I could hang up the typewriter ribbon for I'd have made my statement to the world.

Why do we have doors that "Enter Only" and those that "Exit Only"? Only at Albertson's are these signs necessary since they put all the doors on backwards. (Enter and Exit Left.)

I know there are doors that swing both ways—I've seen them and used them successfully. Oddly, some of these one-way doors are propped open. Does someone think I'm foolish enough to crash headlong into a shopper propelling a steel cart full of goodies? Why do I get this insane desire to grab for a crutch when a parking space says "Handicapped Only"? (I really don't resent the disabled having convenient spaces but how many wheelchairs do they expect are coming?) (Wouldn't it be nice to have a "Mothers with Toddlers" parking zone as well?) Another sign? Forget it!

A present day comment: Too late for me but there is now special parking for expectant moms. I still think those with babies already here deserve the reserved spaces more than those just expecting.

Speed-limit signs are worthless clutter. Speeders ignore them and the rest of us have a pretty good idea of a safe rate for the prevailing conditions. I won't even mention billboards advertising

"Retirement Villages." ("Hey, Maude, let's pop off the interstate and buy one of those cute little places on the golf course while we are in Florida.") Or the one along I-4 that advertises fur coats. ("Aw, c'mon sweetie, it might get cold while we are here.")

Signs used to be fun. There used to be "No Spitting" signs everywhere. These have been replaced by "No Smoking" in three languages and a slash across a burning butt. If the international symbolism had been applied to spitters can you imagine the resulting picture? Old Barbasol (that's shaving cream to you youngsters) ads that kept us awake on primitive highways have been resurrected, by of all people, the Department of Transportation. Unfortunately, not too many of us speed-read; and even if we do, we should be looking ahead, not to the shoulder of the road.

Some signs have been rightfully relegated to history: "Colored" and "White" designations, for example.

Some signs are OK. I especially like to know what highway I am traveling on. It might be nice to have a few more of these at intersections. It's also convenient to know where you are heading—the name of the next town, perhaps—not one 380 miles down the road? I like signs that tell me where I can buy gasoline or find a mechanic. It doesn't really take a billboard to do this. I'd be willing to settle for a nice little rectangular brown sign—or blue—or pink. If I really need the service, I will be looking for the sign.

Neither do I require those giant things that must interfere with air traffic that I can see for forty miles.

There are some signs that are sedate, that are acceptable to my sense of aesthetics, but curious. I've never figured out how it can be twenty-two miles to the State Museum in Cedar Key (which is on the far side of the city), and twenty-four miles to the City of Cedar Key, from the intersection of Highway 24 and US 19. There really aren't too many ways to get to either place from that intersection. Or did I miss a shortcut?

Common Sense and the Census

April 1990

The consensus around my house is that there is little sense to the census. There was a very good chance that I wouldn't have been counted at all except for the fluke of timing that caused me to open a back bedroom door that is reserved for children sneaking in and out and my mother emptying cat litter. At least I found the form before the next ten-year span.

Maybe I was born under the sign of the Government Printing Office, but I like filling out forms. It is a challenge to me to see how far I can get without misspelling my own name or getting myself born last fall. I consider it my civic duty to be counted in the census. What was good enough for Mary and Joseph is good enough for me and the least I can do is count the number of people in my household (this is the tricky part). It appears that none of my children are part of the household (tell them that!) and Dave is sort of iffy. How can he be head of the household if he isn't a member of the household? (Run that one by Quizmaster sometime!) For the sake of argument I listed him as Number One. (Just ask him—he will tell you that is the designation.)

We were traveling, not by ass, but by Audi down Highway 24 and I was diligently working on the census form. It was curious because this time nobody cared how many bathrooms I had or how many jobs I was malingering through. They no longer cared about my warts or corns or dry scalp. It wasn't nearly as much fun. I asked David how old he was this year—that was personal enough to his way of thinking. Then, Darling said, "I hope you're doing that in pencil." Pencil? What's a pencil? I'm using my best fine-line crossword-puzzle-type pen! "Huh, Dave, I don't think you're going to exist on this census." I know women who would like to eliminate husbands that easy, but I'm not one of them.

Did you ever try to erase black ink from a government form? It was then, someplace between Bronson and Otter Creek, that I threw one of my classic all-time-favorite tantrums: I railed against everything governmental from daylight saving time to poll taxes. "Susie, poll taxes went out with wearing white sheets."

"It doesn't matter. Why do I have to use a pencil?"

Later in the clear light of a Cedar Key afternoon I dutifully

penciled over my inked script. I was still wondering why they cared so much about my skin color and how much money David makes. (I'd like to know that myself.) I put the document in the mail, hoping that indeed Dave still existed in this household. The very next morning the doorbell rang (or made a noise, which is more like what it does). It was my favorite Canadian neighbor, Paula. "Someone left your Census form at our house." She handed me a thick packet. Maybe they care about the number of my bathrooms after all! Or maybe they just didn't believe David's age and wanted me to try again.

Appliances

May 1991

The other evening as I was adjusting my glasses so that I could read whether I was putting a load of clothes into the washer or the dryer, I started thinking about young brides of today. What kind of high-tech invention will a man invent to complicate their first twenty-five years of marriage?

I grew up in an era of the electric washing machine—complete with wringer—and a solar powered dryer in the form of a long clothesline. By the time I married, I needed a degree in physics (to keep the loads balanced), a course in chemistry so as to not explode the utility room, and an engineering certificate to keep the gears, cams and impellers impelling. It wouldn't have hurt at all to have gone to Vo-Tech to learn plumbing, mechanics and electrical maintenance.

There was a day when I used to flip the "On" button to the radio and start my day. Are you ready for this? Now, I must read the carefully worded instructions: Turn VCR to AUX; Stereo on Deck 2; Power Switch on; Select AM, FM or Tape; Insert Tape; Rewind Cassette; Push Play. (If this doesn't work, go back to bed.)

Dishwashing is now a science. We don't just dump a load of dirty dishes into the sink and sprinkle some powder over them. We rinse them under a spray. Debris is supposed to go down a disposal if you've flipped the right switch and not turned on the carport lights by mistake. We place plates carefully in their assigned slots and hope the tower isn't blocked by an errant skillet. We've learned

the smell of melting plastic and know yet another Tupperware lid has gone to its polyurethane elysium field.

There are some appliances that just naturally don't like each other. Smoke alarms and stoves, for example. Every time my self-cleaning oven does its job, the smoke alarm has to get into the act. Even when I bring in the help of the range hood—which got its dander up and shorted itself—I'm still looking for the one and only circuit in the breaker box not identified to turn off the smoke alarm. "I'm here," I yell. "There is no fire! I've got it under control! I'm just trying to clean the oven!"

I shouldn't talk about my vacuum cleaner. Let us just call it a vacuum since it does not clean. Originally, it had seven-hundred attachments and could walk over water, paint portraits and sand-blast the Taj Mahal. Today I say: "Sweetie, how about a little cat hair?" It swallows the tablecloth! Other people can indeed vacuum cushions! I have to retrieve them from vacuum cleaner bags! David says, "It has a perfectly good motor!" So let's bronze it and drop it over the "Hoover" Dam (or, is it the Damn Hoover?). We shouldn't talk about vacuum cleaners!

What can modern science do to new brides? If their minds are as unwritten a page as mine was it should be fun.

If You Are What You Read, Then I Am in Trouble

May 1990

Almost everyone will admit to reading *Ann Landers* or *Dear Abby*, but whom among you will stand up and be counted among the loyal *Phantom* followers? For those of you not in the know, the Phantom is the Guardian of the Eastern Dark, lives in the jungle (when he is not in the Skull Cave), is guarded by pygmies, now has a beautiful wife who is a delegate to the United Nations, has twin children who live in a tree house and swing from vines. He has a big white horse and a faithful wolf companion, wears a purple leotard and mask. He bashes gangsters heads in and leaves little skull marks on their chins. He then retreats with his loving family to an isle called "Eden" where the tigers and piranha are tame and

they all go water skiing on pairs of dolphin. Their cottage is a jade hut and the sand is spun gold. It's an odd family but not as strange as some others I've met in the real world.

I am, to be sure, a newspaper freak and in particular, a comic strip devotee. Once David found me sitting in the Copenhagen airport giggling over a *Beetle Bailey*, that originated in Oslo. I've been known to have withdrawal symptoms if I don't get my daily fix of the funnies.

Where and who coined the name "funnies" certainly had a weird sense of humor. They didn't start out that way, nor were these cartoons designed for children. The earliest were politically motivated and were meant to satirize political and social events. Thomas Nast is probably the best known of the early cartoonists and his artwork was biting enough to draw attention to one of the biggest scandals of the country. He is credited with helping to expose Tammany Hall through his cartoons. This was no *Blondie and Dagwood* fare.

Someplace along the line the funnies developed a soap opera mentality. Enter *Mary Worth*, *Brenda Starr* and *Judge Parker*. *Mary Worth* is really pretty funny—but for all the wrong reasons. This grandmotherly old dame who sits around a pool wearing a wool suit and heels started out as a flower lady on a street corner not too many years ago. She evolved into a society maven and curator of etiquette. And Brenda? Well, I lost track of Brenda Starr a year or so ago, but the "event of the year" was when she married her "mystery man" whom she'd been courting for over twenty years (he was always disappearing to some island to get another supply of serum for his rare disease). Somehow Brenda stayed the same age even though I went through puberty and had three children while she stayed an eternal twenty-three. Just as well the paper dropped her; I was getting a complex!

It really doesn't matter whether I identify with these characters or not: I'll never be a single professional young woman like Cathy—never have been, to tell you the truth. I don't binge on food or clothes. Still, there is something touching about her plight. It shouldn't be funny, but it is! *For Better Or Worse* comes closer, but my kids are grown and I never had to battle snow like they do in Canada. A recent poll was taken on comic strip readers. It was said that it is a rare individual that reads every strip. Meet one!

A waste of time, you say? Probably. Tasteless rubbish? Probably. Educational? Rarely. Still, for the price of a newspaper you can taste a slice of American Pie. Real Soul Food.

My dad worked for the *Tampa Tribune* for over twenty-five years. During those years I'd often be seated on the huge rolls of newsprint and wait for him to finish work while my mom ran errands or shopped. These rolls were much taller than my head, so I really *had* to be seated on them. I knew the pressmen and the linotype men. I was conversant with Daddy's shop (he was chief of maintenance) and knew the big plates that ran along the pulleys from one end of the place to the other. When they were running, ink flew! The men would cover my school uniform in what looked like a surgical scrub and put one of those square hats on me. This was always just about quitting time so I'd help Daddy get his tools in order for the next day and still come home ink covered.

One day I was at the paper on a Tuesday and Daddy was tickled to see me: "Hey, you can see the Sunday funnies run!" It nearly broke my heart to find out that the Sunday funnies were printed on Tuesday! It is like Santa bagging up presents in July!

Watermelon Wine and Old Movies Make Me Cry

November 1989

I've mixed my metaphors and song titles as usual, but the meaning is the same. I love old movies. I haven't tried the "watermelon wine." Probably if I did I'd "cry me a river."

My old movies played about forty years ago when nobody minded if I tossed popcorn off the balcony and slam dunked it right there dead center into the cup of Hires Root Beer in the hand of the lady just beneath my seat. This was a time when I could turn around and learn the facts of life right there in the back row. Does anybody remember movies the way I do? There were real live ushers even at the Saturday matinee. I hasten to explain that these were no more than teenage bouncers, but usher sounds so elegant! These were the guys who were supposed to keep order when somebody yelled "Fire"—which people did when the movie got just too boring for

words.

I have some very fond memories of movies. My brother Jack, seven years older, used to escort me to the pictures. I'd say, "Jack, you can come out from under the seat now. They drove the stake through his heart." Nobody really paid attention to whether our little psyches were being warped. We each spent a quarter (that includes popcorn!)—OK, after all, fifty cents.

Well, kids, it just ain't the same. Movie people know it. The magic is lost someplace between getting the money to pay for the evening at the drive-up teller and the paying for the soft drink that should cost no more than the cup price. It's gone with the balconies. It's gone when kids can't throw popcorn into somebody's root beer or hair. It's gone when Lash LaRue stopped coming to step up on stage and teach us urchins how to crack a whip. The magic went away when the Duncan Yo-Yo people stopped giving demonstrations between double features.

The other night I had the occasion to watch *Harvey*. Do you remember *Harvey*? That six-foot-three-and-one-half-inch white rabbit that followed Elwood P. Dowd (played by Jimmy Stewart) around—in and out of saloons and asylums? The movie itself is a little short on message and has a non-existent plot. One could possibly deduce that overindulgence in martinis predisposes one to companionship with tall white rabbits. Or, possible overexposure to well-meaning dowager sisters and stuffy mansions does the trick. Whatever, this is about the funniest movie that has ever been made. It is in black and white and set like a stage play. There is no cast of thousands, no gladiators. No chorus line. You won't want to miss a line because every word counts.

No one takes his (or her) clothes off—even Harvey stays fully dressed while invisible. There is a suggestion that the dowager sister is put in a bathtub. One recognizes that both Stewart and the rabbit drink too much. The medical profession is lampooned—harpooned—is a better word. It is such a wonderful example of the unsophisticated movie: sheer fun.

I recently heard that Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings classic *The Yearling* is being re-released. The eminent critics Siskel and Ebert warned parents that the movie may be too violent for children. (I mean, after all, the kid is told to shoot Bambi, right?) These are the same children who are being told to "Just Say No" to drugs? These are

the kids who must be informed to leave their switchblades at home before entering school? These are the same kids who can check out the latest "Freddie the Gross" movie at the convenience store? Yup, I cried through *The Yearling*, too. It was a good cry, a healthy cry. I guess I learned something from the movie: sometimes we have to do things we don't want to do. (I don't think I would have shot the deer. I'd probably have run away from home to Gainesville or someplace, first.)

If it weren't for old movies I probably wouldn't even have a television set. Most of the time the reception is so bad anyway that Oprah's voice is superimposed over Arsenio's body with Vanna flipping the weather charts for Channel 20 news. It makes for interesting living out here on the Ridge.

I ponder how some of the old movies would be rated today. Growing up under the auspices of the Legion of Decency, I knew better than to even try to sneak into such horrors as *The Moon Is Blue*. To this day, I haven't seen the movie, but my brother Jack did. He even took a date. The word "abortion" was mentioned. My how times have changed! There was another condemned movie, *Baby Doll* with Carroll Baker. She was shown in a nightie (appropriately called "baby-doll pajamas"). If you saw the historic *Lolita* you may as well have emblazoned a Scarlet A above your left breast).

I remember that it was perfectly fine to see GI's blow heads off Japanese soldiers. I watched as young guys my brothers' ages slogged through yellow mud in infested jungles. It was great fun to watch planes being blown to smithereens as long as they had a red rising sun on the side. John Wayne would then kiss Maureen O'Hara and all would be well with the world.

Fellow Old Movie Watchers knew it wasn't all well with the world. In today's effort to be truthful, we've lost some magic. We don't seem to know how to poke fun at our human foibles anymore. We don't frolic in the fact that we are just human people: we don't know how to laugh at the Elwood P. Dowds anymore. We don't see the white rabbits.

Let's Get Environmental

Here in Florida we have a saying: "If you aren't happy with the weather, wait five minutes and it will change." So it is with so many things in Florida: Wait long enough and someone will build a city where there was once a swamp and a canal where once was a narrow waist of the state. We dam our rivers to create hallowed fishing areas for a state that is surrounded by water. Cities like to brag about their ice-hockey arenas when the temperatures outside are hovering in the neighborhood of Fahrenheit 100. We air condition our world, then complain that the population is burgeoning. We insist on super interstate highways and then yell bloody murder that our taxes are rising. We build superhighways and complain that people travel south on them. We are the deepest-south state of the deep south—populated with more northerners than the state of Maine. We don't like it hot—we don't like it cold. We complain about the rain and can't live with drought. We have fierce (sometimes icy) winds and sink-holes. Let me introduce you to my fickle friend—I call her Mother Nature. She is what the professors like to call "The Environment." Welcome to my Florida: the critters, the bugs and the buggy critters.

I grew up with her in my back yard and she has followed me around the world. As a child I gave her only a brief nod and a bit of respect. As an adult I find myself having to protect the old lady from people who throw trash at her feet and scar her beauty with their carelessness. I find myself aghast with head hanging in shame at those who believe she is indestructible.

Look about—lend the old lady a hand. Give Mother Nature something to smile about—for a change.

Walking On The Wildflower Side

Probably one of the nicest birthday presents I ever received was from David as I emerged from a cave on my 39th birthday.

(Please don't ask what I was doing sleeping in a cave or I might tell you.) It was a bunch of purple posies that grew out of a rock in the Utah desert. That says something about our relationship. I have been well trained not to support the Florists of the World. Dave may "say it with flowers" but you can bet that it was his God that was doing the selling. His God doesn't use green waxed paper. Dave had found a funny little piece of nearly petrified wood and stuffed it with moss and put these curious blooms in it. By noon they were a "dried arrangement" but of all the corsages that I vowed to keep and the roses I planned to press, the only thing I have kept in reverence is this bunch of purple something or others.

There is a magic in wild flowers. In Florida we have little opportunity to stop and smell them, touch them or pick them along the interstate highways: we see them as blurs of yellow, red, purple, white. Off the road, however, we are treated to the individual blooms: fragile stems, sometimes prickly leaves, a colorful show and one that usually wilts within five minutes of plucking. Why do we want to pick them at all? The answer is easy: we want to bring home some of the real "Magic Kingdom." It never works, but we will continue to try.

It must be a matter of personality, but I enjoy my roses rambling and my daisies scattered across a field. Wild grapevines thrill me that they produce fruit when a well tended vineyard brings out the "ho-hum–isn't that nice" in me. I can have fits when I inadvertently mow down the goldenrod while wending my way through the tall grasses that I love. There's this thing about wildflowers: they are not really wild. They need some attention from above in the form of sun and rain. They take their nourishment from below in the form of soil. When they get cultivated, like Eliza Doolittle, they lose much of their charm.

Walking on the Wide-Wild-Side is a thing to do. Try it.

Interviews Are Where You Find Them...

By some quirk of the little gray cells, this reminds me of Tom T. Hall's song: "Old Dogs and Children and Watermelon Wine." For those of you uninitiated in country music, Tom finds himself in a lounge in the

Miami airport "sippin' blended whiskey down when an old black gray haired gentleman" puts his mop down and joins him to expound on the secrets of his longevity. (The old man is all of 65!) (Tom must have written this when he was 21.) Nevertheless, songwriter Tom T. scribbles down the old man's wisdom and writes a song.

I don't write songs and cannot carry a tune in a bucket, but I do find myself "interviewing" in strange places at odd hours. I write notes on the back of Winn-Dixie receipts and old parking tickets. Sometimes I have the joy of having lined paper and a pen that works. Dave and I were not in the bar of the Miami airport, but rather, in the cozy living room of the Roquemore Annex in Orlando—where son and father spend their time when Dave is not in Cedar Key.

We were, in fact, on a layover there together enroute to Miami and deciding which of the movies playing in the Big Town was worthy of our patronage. We weren't sipping blended whiskey. It was more like the low priced spread: Carlings on ice. I was showing off some outrageous clothes that I had purchased during the day when there came a knock at the door.

I heard Dave say: "You people blow up boats, don't you?" Hey, like wow, Dave doesn't talk like this! I do believe he was getting around to insinuating that the person at the door was a flaming pinko. My bat-like sensors tuned in to the conversation. "Susan! Come and talk to this young man!" I guess I was being especially assertive that day, but I suggested that he just bring the person to me. I had looked out the window. The young man could have been a mass murderer, but he looked like our second son and carried a knapsack. It was unseasonably warm and he was walking door to door. It was clear to me that he had some son of "mission," and because Dave had asked me to talk to him, I knew he was not peddling religion.

The young man at the door had dark hair and a shy smile. He said he was born in Washington, D. C. and grew up in Perry, Florida. He's nineteen years old. Until recently he was a student of robotics with International Telephone and Telegraph's school in Maitland. Then he learned about the Greenpeace Movement. He'd seen and smelled the timbering in Perry and loved his hunting and fishing and did his share of teenage worrying about the quality of his river, the Fenholloway. While he was trying to explain why he was canvassing this neighborhood, I was prying into his psyche: Why and What made you want to work for Greenpeace? It was obvious to me, as the mother of three sons, that he was

probably just tired of air-conditioning, taking notes and writing papers. I kept my mouth shut (that's the way you learn things).

To understand what was going on in my own head at that moment you must know that Dave and I were on our way to the State Garden Club Convention that weekend. We are both avowed environmentalists and can be vehement for the cause of preserving our fragile eco-system. Each of us has had some reservations about the methods used by Greenpeace to bring about reform or stop certain developments in our society–the world at large. To wit: I cannot condone destruction of life or property in the name of reform. Do the ends justify the means? I think not.

The young man, with all the charm and verve of a 19-year-old crusader, asked us to sign petitions on behalf of a whaling moratorium, the "sea turtle bills," to help finance research for alternate energy sources, prevent offshore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, stop the restart of the nuclear plant on the Savannah River and have a go at an international Waste Trade Ban. I had no hesitation in placing my name on the lists of these causes. He took great care to explain them in detail to my lawyer husband and show him the wording of the petition. Dave reads before he signs anything! Interviews run deeper than just questions and answers. When I shifted gears into the Barbara Walters probing mode, Dave thought I was playing a rough game with this tenderfoot. I asked him if he minded being interviewed for the *Cedar Key Beacon* and being quoted. He shifted around in the antique rocker. His glass of ice water suddenly steamed. It was clear that this would be a topic in the "boiler-room" the next day. We elicited a promise from him not to bother the grandparents next door and made sure he kept that promise.

I wonder now what would have happened had he found someone else in residence instead of us. Murder on the "Rue Chichester!" Perhaps "Shouting Match Breaks Sound Barrier!"

A pitfall of an interviewer is being interviewed. He asked me a couple of hard questions that I could not answer except by default. Would I have marched for equal rights knowing that a riot would ensue? No. (But I might have been in the march not knowing the result.) Will I sit in a tree to save a plain? Yes. Will I blockade boats that are out to decimate the whale population and have the whalers become violent? Probably not.

While our interviewee searched his folders for documentation, Dave took some pictures. Hopefully, my bare feet are not in evidence. What is clear then is that this organization, founded in 1971 with a mere six people, has spawned the interest and interest and enthusiasm

of more than one million people world wide. No government financially supports Greenpeace: whether you agree with the methods or machinations, it is an organization worth interviewing and reviewing. Japan has a vested interest in whales for sale. The USA in oil. Acid rain falls from the sky. These are things to think about. If I sit in a tree, will it save Payne's Prairie? We filled up his canteen with a few ice cubes and sent him out on his way. There weren't any old dogs in evidence nor was there any watermelon wine. There was a child—tomorrow's world—who came to visit. We never did get to the movies that night.

After he left, Dave said "You know, you were not being fair to that kid!" I knew. Interviews are where they happen.

Recycling...
July 1989

If the manufacturers of the world were to put together a hit list, I would be seeking refuge in a monastery. My mother invented recycling and my husband honed it to a precise science. Some of the recycling was born out of financial necessity, some in the name of creativity. Sometimes, it was just sheer fun. Mama made dresses out of feed sacks (they were pretty flowered patterns of sturdy cotton fabric). We saved the string that unraveled from the top of the sack. When the dress finally wore out, it was carefully carved into squares, circles, triangles and made into a quilt. Mama saved every jelly glass that came through the door. As kids, we carefully separated tin foil from the waxed paper on gum wrappers, rolled it into balls, and contributed it to the war effort. We collected enough tin foil to build at least a couple of tanks. Coffee grounds and egg shells were buried to make the soil better. The list goes on and on.

Paper products were burned, but not until after my brother built elaborate cities and towns out of cereal boxes and toilet paper rolls. What started out as a punishment for nearly burning down the garage wound up being a weekly ritual and game. The ashes were scattered to "sweeten" the soil. Coffee cans not only held plants but were saved to hold all manner of tools. Baby food jar lids were nailed to racks and jars screwed on for pins, needles, nuts and bolts. Large fruit juice cans became footstools covered with drapery material. We didn't own a garbage disposal since what wasn't eaten

by my older brothers was fed to the rabbits, chickens, dogs, cats or birds.

I'm not sure when we changed but suddenly (it seemed) that the garbage and trash collector became the most popular visitor of the week. Maybe it started when we stopped putting the used milk bottles on the porch in the metal container that said "Poinsettia Dairy." Maybe it was when Jack outgrew the weekly ritual burning. Maybe it was when the city became sophisticated enough to frown on dumping wash water directly on the ground or insisted on a sewer hookup rather than the time honored septic tank. Nobody thought much about where this waste would go—after all, the river led into the Gulf of Mexico and soon our house was connected to this natural septic tank by authorized pipes. Maybe it was when we became affluent enough to buy new shoes rather than have the old ones resoled, or more likely half-soled, or have metal plates put on the worn down heels.

I think it was sometime about the time when "smart" people stopped starching cotton shirts and began wearing nylon drip-dry clothing; when soda straws no longer became soggy before the soda was finished. It could have been when my mother bought the first set of Tupperware tumblers or Mel-mac dishes. Things that had previously been meant to break, chip, peel, dissolve or otherwise self destruct, no longer did so. They did, however, become ugly, stained and expendable. We tossed them in the trash—destined for who cared where.

Anyone of my generation can remember the whispered confidence of the tycoon to the fledgling in The Graduate, "Plastics!" It was a funny line. In our innocence we didn't realize that we were shooting ourselves in the foot by laughing. The future *was* in plastics!

I didn't wash out each and every plastic bag for reuse nor carefully scrape, rinse and fold the aluminum foil that comes into my home. This effort must be balanced by the amount of detergent and water I use and where it will go. I still toss a lot of it. I have neighbors whom I am sure would not appreciate my burying or burning garbage. I don't have chickens, rabbits or dogs so I toss the remainder of our meals into the disposal.

Now, we have right here in Cedar Key a monumental effort to keep my guilt at a low roar: we finally and wonderfully have

recycling bins! It's not going to be easy to train me to save and sort those aluminum cans or glass jars. I know how to save newspapers! I've battled Florida bugs for forty-six years and finally live in a house that has nothing uglier than a mosquito or house spider. It's going to be a real pain to wash and separate this household accumulation. I'm going to try.

Pick your own reason and let's do it.

In other cities with big-buck budgets, such drives are accomplished by affording the residents with collection boxes and are picked up by city personnel. In our case, we do it ourselves!

The only reward I can see for such an enterprise is doing a very small part in helping to preserve for our children a planet that is in trouble.

Stash The Trash!

"That's Not the Way We Do It Back Home!"

November 1992

Doesn't it really gripe the living daylights out of you when a visitor tries to tell you how to put the toilet paper on the roller or apply a band-aid or bathe a cat? Me too. Sometimes, I shut up just long enough to listen, and surprise! I learn something. Last week, for example, I learned how to lop branches (correctly) from flora threatening a backwoods trail. I never thought of there being a right or wrong way to clear the brush, but it made sense to me, who purports to be kind to nature, not to destroy the plant in the process. (There are some killer vines it wouldn't grieve me to lose!) In case you are wondering, the right way is to avoid an open-cut appearance so when it bushes out, it will still look natural. We would do the same for our roses, wouldn't we?

It's still a hard pill for me to swallow, but I've actually come to the realization that some people *do* know more about some things than I do. Some people just might have a better way to do something than we do in Florida. I spent a lot of time on the road this summer and had a lot of time to think about our world and how we are treating it. We aren't always too nice to this planet and even to

our own backyards. That's why, on this sunniest of Florida November Saturdays, I was out there dragging a black plastic sack down the highway, picking up somebody else's trash, *again*! I know you don't throw it out of your cars and I know you don't intentionally have it blow out of your trucks, but by whatever mysterious phenomena, it winds up there on the roadside and in the ditches. It's not nearly the horrifying mess it was last year. We've narrowed the culprit down to anyone who drinks out of an aluminum can or a bottle, smokes cigarettes that come in packages, or buys a Florida lottery ticket. Those of you who partake of those little after-dinner mints given away at a popular Cedar key restaurant are on my list too. I'm fairly certain I won't nab any mint wrapper tossers and don't want any vigilante spirit to even try to find you can tossers. That brings me to the point of this shriek. Why cannot we, as a civilized society, make it downright more profitable to keep the cans and bottles for return to whence they came? Then, if you chose to toss that Bud, Pepsi, Coors, Mountain Dew, at least I could return them for some big bucks. There would be an impetus to recycle, rather than as the antis say, discourage a fledgling recycling movement. Some of us will always be there to pick up the trash when you choose not to return your empties. It sounds all too simple.

It does work in many states. I paid deposit on every can and bottle I purchased in the New England states. I didn't return one of them for money. Hotel workers loved that treasure trove I left for them. Maine has recycling centers but I chose to plow my deposit money back through the local economy rather than to spend time on mundane things. In that pristine countryside I might not have made it back to Florida alive had I chosen to toss anything into the bushes. They just don't put up with such things. Unfortunately for us, Florida does.

I do recognize that it would be an added burden, at least at first, for shopkeepers to be bothered with the problem of accepting returnables. Florida is a buggy place and dirty drink bottles would soon become roach motels. My suggestion is that if the shopkeeper chooses to sell a particular brand of liquid, he or she should be responsible for accepting that product's clean container return. Every bill presented to our legislative body has included compensation for this effort Maybe it isn't enough compensation—maybe it would actually hurt business for awhile. The goodwill generated by

thousands of Adopt-A-Highway volunteers might offset the initial annoyance of having to find a place for the drink bottles and cans awaiting recycling, paying an additional clerk, and always the paperwork involved.

I stabbed what seemed like a four-hundredth can and met Dave on the other side of the road.

"Having fun yet? Are the road crews mowing for us or 'agin' us?" (When we come before them, the weeds are waist high; when after, we wade through shredded cans and broken bottles.)

"Susan, you should write a letter!"

"David, why don't *you* write a letter?"

It suddenly, like a lightning flash, occurred to me that somebody might listen to him instead of always hearing from me.

He countered: "Just write to each of our legislators and invite him or her to join us the next time you plan a work party." I'd like to see how many takers I get after two hours of this! There just wouldn't be a negative vote in that august body. It might just put us bag ladies out of business. What a pleasant thought!

P.S. If you long for a simpler day when kids earned money by picking up bottles for spending money (at 2 cents a bottle we could buy a comic cook and blow the whole wad at the same store where we returned the bottles), write a letter expressing you thoughts to me. I promise to forward them to our representatives and senators and governor. Every major conservation minded organization in the United States supports curtailing throwaways. If you don't agree, that's okay too, but tell me or your legislator why. Then come out and join us next February when it will probably be raining and cold, for the next pickup!

What Ever Happened to the Cross-Florida Barge Canal?

It was a good idea that just didn't work and was never really laid to rest. The idea was to build a barge canal from Jacksonville on the east coast to Yankeetown on the west coast. It would have sliced the state of Florida in half horizontally. It was to be a boon to shipping and navigation. One could have avoided "rounding the horn," and the canal was to

have created a recreational and sport fishing paradise.

The idea of the Florida Barge Canal began in 1931 under the Hoover administration. It was one of those ideas to give good men good work in hard times. Hard times got harder and the money ran out. War came, and the plan for the canal was set aside.

By the time the 1950's and prosperity returned to the country, travelers were used to seeing concrete relics—reminiscent of a Stonehenge—draped in kuddzu vine—reminders that there was to have been a cross-Florida canal.

Certain parts of the canal had been completed and Florida was not only reaping the benefits of dammed rivers but paying the price. The wild Ocklawaha River was in parts now as straight as a bullet's path. The creation of the Rodman Dam in Marion County opened up new horizons for the sportsfishermen and recreational boaters.

As Florida became more economically important to the nation as a whole, and transportation of goods once again became an issue, some folks remembered the "forgotten" canal.

At the same time, Florida was growing in population and industry. There was growing as well, in parallel, a heightened awareness of its ecological fragility. The importance of wetlands, endangered and threatened wildlife habitats, that delicate balance between nature and man's needs became not just a Florida issue but one of national concern. The sides were drawn as well as the swords.

Environmentalists blocked every move to dig yet another shovelful of muck, lay yet another concrete girder or disturb another wild stream. Environmentalists pressed for laying to rest, once and for all that "pie in the sky"—the Cross-Florida Barge Canal.

President Nixon threw a shovelful of dirt into the canal by his order to cease and desist any building. His order was overridden by Congress and only by a federal court injunction was work finally stopped. The question is: will the work stay stopped?

The State of Florida owns, by reason of fee title or easement, 90% of the land involved in the Florida Barge Canal. The United States Army Corps of Engineers has rights to 7,800 acres, which is a small sample indeed, but enough to worry environmentalists.

The work stoppage injunction is still in effect but the canal itself has never been officially de-authorized. This means that if the land now controlled by the state of Florida should fall under federal control—as is proposed by certain legislators—Florida could indeed wind up with a canal after all.

Florida Counties Levy, Putnam, Clay, Marion and Duval are principals in the ongoing struggle to build or not to build. Over 40,000 acres of proposed canal land lie in Marion County. Industrial Duval has been traditionally in favor of the canal and the now sleepy village of Yankeetown once hailed the canal as its ticket to boomtown status.

A specially organized committee, the Cross-Florida Canal Navigational District Commission, met in Cedar Key last week to make policy statements and manage monies accrued from the land holdings. It is a non-partisan group comprised of informed citizens from the five involved counties.

Theirs is a curious and curiouser job. Not only do they have the fiscal responsibility of money management but a moral dilemma as well. According to one commissioner, the money has been managed efficiently and has had modest returns in local investing within the five counties. Now it seems that people who originally sold the land for the purpose of building a canal want to buy it back—but want to buy at 1930's prices! (Much of the land in question was sold for two dollars an acre!)

Strict environmentalists want to go full speed ahead and return the lands to the natural state. This would mean literally booting out the Army Corps of Engineers, who have, after all, been doing just what they were asked to do nearly sixty years ago. Hypothetically, if the federal government were to abandon the project, the land—under the terms of many sales or leases—would revert to the original owners or heirs and be subject to commercial development—which is exactly what the environmentalists oppose! The federal position would be to create a linear park—no revision of the already straightened canal areas—for public use.

The position of the State of Florida is quite different. Florida wishes to maintain control of the acreage under the title of a State Conservation and Recreational Area: green space, reservoirs, recreational use and a return of the acreage to a somewhat natural state. This is necessarily a long-term commitment for the people of Florida. Property rights, the environment, fifty-year-old projects that didn't fly are not new to this state. Increasingly, Cedar Keyans are learning that indeed we do not live on an island.

A present day comment: In 1990 President George Bush signed into law the bill de-authorizing the Cross Florida Barge Canal project and changing the purpose of the lands to recreation and conservation. In 1991 Florida agreed to the terms of the Federal de-authorization bill, thereby officially de-authorizing the Cross-Florida Barge Canal project. This action ultimately led to the creation of the Cross-Florida Greenway State Recreation and Conservation Area, which in 1998 was officially

renamed the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross-Florida Greenway in honor of the individual who led the fight to stop the Cross-Florida Barge Canal project.

The Barge Canal Is History; Now What About the Reservoir?

The truth of the matter is, I don't know what to say about the Rodman Reservoir! Too many people have taken stands on one side or the other without knowing as much as I do, and that isn't much at all.

The Rodman Dam and Reservoir became fishermen's heaven when a large lake was created from straightening the meandering Ocklawaha. In the interceding years, even though the barge canal itself was deactivated as a project, the Reservoir continued a Marion County boon: a fishermen's resort area; home to bass tournaments and dollar signs; a real paradise for people who thrive on shooting fish in a barrel and whose livelihoods rely on the people with those aspirations. It is an expensive thing to maintain no matter whose figures you look at. According to the *Gainesville Sun*, maintenance of the dam will cost between one and 1.8 million dollars a year. Restoring the river to its meandering state isn't cheap either, anywhere between four million and thirty-six million dollars, but that once done should be done, and left alone!

My question is should we keep fixing things that aren't broke? My sense of sentiment says to return the river to its natural state: we had lots more fish, more than today, when the rivers were wild, but then we didn't have copious and often rapacious fishermen in fast boats and seeing-eye scopes. We didn't have a whole segment of people depending on bass tournaments and selling equipment and rooms and campsites and stuff to people, either. They didn't cause the dam to be built so why should they suffer? I cannot be a pure environmentalist—since I know people's lives depend on their businesses—but maybe that is just one of the hard knocks of living.

A question I have to broach to my fellow environmentalists is if they (we) can determine how much better overall fishing might be, and *when*, if the river is returned to its natural state. If there is a chance that it is in our lifetimes, can we not appeal to those true

sportsfishermen that it would be even better, a greater challenge to find the lunker in a wild hole than cruising around the pilings in the reservoir? Will not enterprising businessmen re-activate the time honored idea of river fishing? Just maybe.

There will be a three-year study before a decision is made. In three years time, I hope to learn more about the implications of letting the reservoir stand as is, partial restoration of the river or just letting the Ocklawaha remain a ditch.

A present day comment: The Rodman Dam battle has raged for a half century and seems no closer to resolution. It is part of the classic war between the power of politics and what many of us feel is the soul of the State of Florida. The Rodman Dam is now officially named the "George R. Kirkpatrick Dam," honoring the state senator most responsible for protecting and preserving the dam. Senator Kirkpatrick was also largely responsible for establishing the Cedar Key Marine Laboratory and it also bears his name. When Marjorie Harris Carr, for whom the Cross-Florida Greenway has been named, died, a bumper sticker was affixed to her coffin: "Free the Ocklawaha." When George Kirkpatrick died several years later, his casket espoused "Save Rodman Reservoir." And so it goes.

In Closing...

Well, there you have it—my career at the *Beacon.* Lots of keyboard time, lots of words and stories shared—hopefully enjoyable—certainly enjoyed by me in the telling.

Now comes the time to move on to sharing my next "career," that of woman of the outdoors, extreme hiker—a transformation from "Super Klutz" to "Super Hiker."

Before I go, however, one last tale, alluded to in *Water Under the Number 4 Bridge:*

Travel is educational. God knows David and I travel. Ergo one shouldn't be surprised when we learn something now and then, here and there.

One of the best lessons I have ever learned was while I was sitting on a barstool in the King Hotel in Cairo, Egypt in 1986. It was the wee hours of the morning. There were only three people in the bar at that hour. David had long since retired and I was engaged in playing a game of chess with the Minister from Oman. He was winning. The bartender brought me another beer and a cheese sandwich. I smiled sweetly at the bar-man and turned back to the game at hand.

Lest you doubt this scenario: Let me explain that we had been traveling with an international group and the evening last was our farewell dinner. Just as I was being seated for dinner our group leader, knowing I was a registered nurse, asked me if I would tend a member of the group who had come down with a bodacious rash. For the next four or five or six hours I bathed this lady in oatmeal baths, soda poultices, called the American Hospital and got a "prescription" filled for some anti-allergenic mystic potion and waited for my ministrations to take effect.

I returned to the dinner table proud of my accomplishment as a front line nurse and as hungry as a camel. David gave me a peck on the forehead and said: "Goodnight, I'm going to bed." The waiter informed me that perhaps I could get a sandwich in the bar. It wasn't fair.

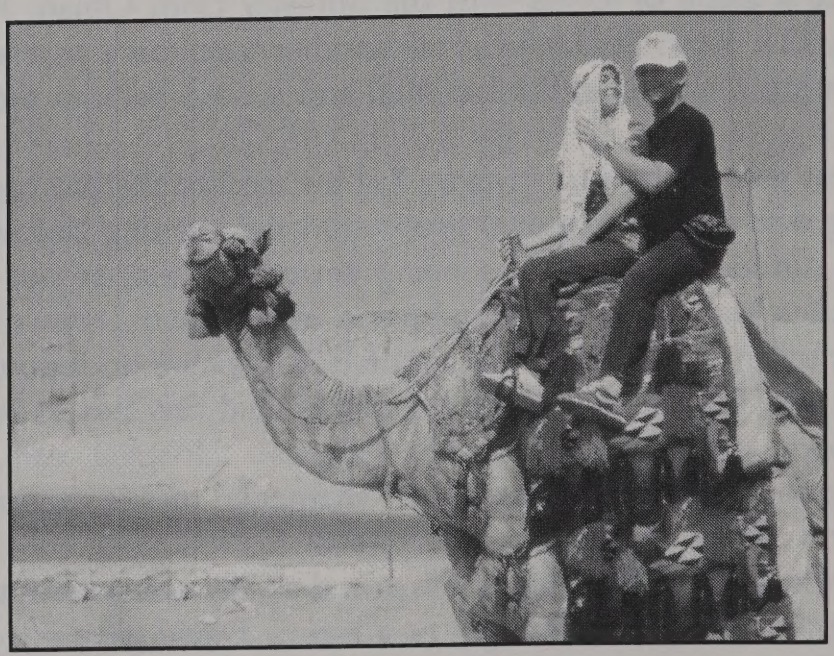
Now you know why I was in the bar of the King Hotel in

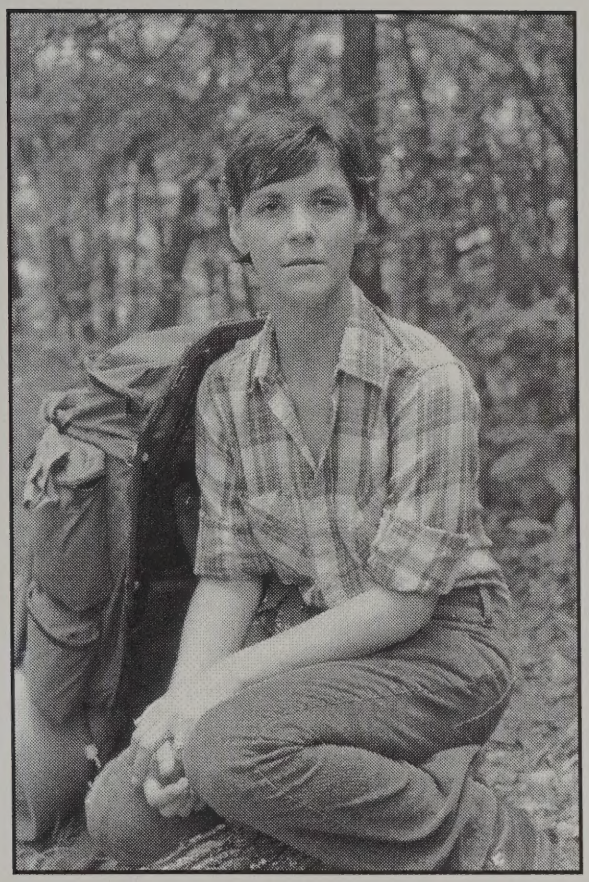
Cairo, Egypt after midnight, sitting next to an honest-to-goodness sheik. And the sheik? At that point in time I never heard of Oman so he had great fun drawing me maps of his Emirate. I think he was just sitting there waiting to ask me if I played chess. Did I play chess? Yes, I learned when I was seven years old (and have not improved one whit since that time).

We laughed at my game. It was a bit like playing poker with Maverick in the Long Branch Saloon. At my best, I am not a serious game player, but after a few glasses of beer it can be downright fun! And, the sheik really was cute. He was wearing full regalia with the robes and head-dress...he looked a little bit like...hmmm...

Time came to end such foolishness. I slid from the barstool and I nodded my goodnights to the bar-man. The sheik walked me to the elevator and I extended my hand in friendship. He took my hand and pressed it firmly in his. I turned my back and opened my hand: a room key—not mine.

I smiled but presumed the world could get into enough trouble without my help. Goodnight, sweet prince!





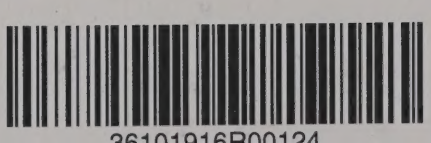
Susan Roquemore is a native of Tampa. She was born, not hatched—despite popular opinions to the contrary. She spent five years at the University of Florida collecting degrees and married a "saint." She and attorney husband David have three sons whom she declines to discuss (at the moment) for fear of child abuse charges: their ages are 30, 27 and 25.

Susan is the author of essays and vignettes of everyday life: albeit her life is not always so "everyday." She wrote a weekly column "Impressions of an Island Lifestyle" for the Cedar Key Beacon for five years.

Her stories are about her everyday existence on the Appalachian Trail, of coping with everyday things like parents and children, and cats with hairballs. She'll tell you about the books she's reading at the moment and maybe (if you aren't lucky!) how she broke her leg in the Maine wilderness or "cured" a case of hives in a Cairo, Egypt hotel room and set a fellucca driver's arm on the same day she played chess with the minister from Oman. You'll learn that her secret passion is fine dining in odd places and her wish is to become some newspaper's Mystery Diner.

When she isn't hiking, Susan lives in Cedar Key with husband David and her two cats, Shadow and Miss Petunia.

Robin Raftis—1994



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Columbia, SC

Praise for *Water Under the Number 4 Bridge:*

Your book brings me such JOY, fun and laughter. You have touched on so many chords of life in Cedar Key. I don't think I have ever laughed until I cried so many times in reading anything....at least twice this week. Your sense of humor is priceless. Jeff Foxworthy and Phyllis Diller....easily your league.....You have such a unique way of laughing at yourself and us...I love it.

Katherine, Cedar Key

This was truly one of the most enjoyable books I have read in a long time. You said you were not Erma but your wit is more realistic than Erma's.

Gloria, Virginia

What a great book you wrote. I absolutely LOVE IT. Please tell me you have several more books percolating in that brain of yours. I always knew you were a great writer, but I didn't know just how great!

Carol Ann, North Carolina

The story continues: As with the first book, this book reflects Susan Roquemore's years of newspaper column writing. Her columns in the *Cedar Key Beacon* covered the waterfront (depending on the tide of her mind at the time) and wandered at times away from Cedar Key and into family stories. *Water Under the Number 4 Bridge is* largely her love letter to Cedar Key. Much of *Turn Left at the Big Osprey Nest* is her homage to family memories, an autobiography in bits and pieces.

ISBN 9781535406215

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